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LITTLE RUSSIAN MASTERPIECES

In Four Volumes

★

Alexander Sergeyevitch Puskin
Masquerading—A Good Shot—The Snowstorm—The Queen of Spades.

Michail Yurievitch Lermontof
A Travelling Episode.

★ ★

M. E. Saltykof-Stchedrin
A Christmas Sermon—The Peasant and the Two Excellencies—The Lost Conscience—The Eagle, Patron of Learning.

D. N. Mamin-Sibiriak
Misgir—The Father Elect.

K. Y. Slutchefsky
Can the End Justify the Means—Coward or Hero?

Zygmunt Niedzwiecki
In May.

Glieb Ivanovitch Uspensky
Inspecting the Bride.

Helen Zeisinger
Christmas Eve in the Forest.

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Nicolas Stepanovitch Lesskof
The Simpleton (*Douratchok*)—The Pearl Necklace—Friends—From an Old Chronicle.

Ignatius Dombrovsky
Legend on the Saturday Sunbeam.

Th. M. Dostoyefsky
The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree.

L. N. Tolstoi
Three Deaths.

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Constantine Mikhailovitch Staniukovitch
Bobtail—The Convict.

V. G. Korolenko
"The Slayer"—Winter.

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Little Russian Masterpieces

Chosen and Translated from the Original Russian by

Zénaïde A. Ragozin (ed.)

With an Introduction and Biographical Notes by

S. N. Syromiatnikof

v. 3.

★ ★ ★

Stories by

Lesskof—Dombrovsky—Dostoiefsky—Tolstoi

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G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1920

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Introduction

MORE than ninety per cent. of the Russian people never read "short stories." They create them, tell them, listen to them. The popular Russian short story, is the *skazka* or fairy tale, which belongs to the province of folklore, probably the richest, most varied, wise, and clever of all folklores of Europe, having absorbed all the richest elements of the East and some of the West. But the short story in the sense in which it is understood by Americans, is the product of the journalization of literature, of the daily press, which did not develop in Russia until the seventies of the nineteenth century. The predecessor of the newspaper, the big monthly, created the "serial," the three-volume novel, usually covering the year with its twelve voluminous instalments.

Up to the eighties of the last century life

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moved in the immense country at a slow pace; time was cheap, and the middle and higher classes demanded of writers either big novels or stories of some thirty to forty pages, which could be read through in the course of a long winter evening around the family samovar.

Modern Russian literature took its beginning from the great Pushkin who produced matchless examples not alone of poetry, but also of prose. He gave us our first short stories, those selected for the present set. But all that is really great in Russian literature must be sought in novels, not in stories. Until quite lately, the latter were but crumbs from the rich banquet of Russian literature. To select from these crumbs what is most typical, most beautiful, most artistic, what gives the deepest insight into the Russian national character and nature, what is finest not alone as to mastery of form, but also as to matter—such is the object of the present collection.

Russia is a deep, wide, abundant river,

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slowly winding its way over the vast expanse of history. Foreigners are fascinated by its tempests, but the waves these tempests raise affect but slightly the deeper layers of its waters. At the time of great wars and revolutions the life of the rural population, however disturbed on the whole, flows along the same lines, ruled by the same laws of climate and soil,—as it did at the time of the great intestine disturbances of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The aristocratization of life goes steadily on; the upper classes undergo a gradual process of weathering, new layers take their places, but the bulk of the agricultural population remains, now as before, the great reservoir of physical, moral, and intellectual forces, determined by conditions of climate, soil, and a past, lived on the boundary between Europe and Asia.

In her choice of material the editor has by no means made it her object to supply sensational reading. Were the majority of the Russian people composed of assassins, revo-

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lutionists, mystics, dreamers of abstractions, Russia would not have outlived the great wars with the Turkish nomads of the ninth to twelfth centuries, the great Tartar invasion of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the great invasions from the West which have succeeded each other with mathematical regularity at the beginning of each of the four last centuries: 1612 by the Poles in Moscow, 1709, the Swedes in Little Russia; 1812, the French in Moscow; 1917, the German in Riga and possibly farther east. . . .

The last three volumes will be devoted to the short story of the latest period from the abortive revolution of 1905 to our own days,—when the short story has been forced by the demands of the daily and weekly press into the form familiar to England and the United States.

S. N. Syromiatnikof.

From the Editor

IT is a trite, but everlastingly true axiom, that a people's life and spirit (and what is literature but the quintessence of both?) are fashioned chiefly by the nature of the country it inhabits. Now Russian nature is not jocose, not sensational; she is serious, severe half of the year; in places stern; and where and when she smiles, her smile is serious, gentle, winning, not conquering; pensive and a wee bit sad, but all the more penetrating and endearing—more deeply, enduringly so than the gorgeous, dazzling landscapes of East and South.

Accordingly, until quite lately—and that mostly in imitation of others—Russian literature has not been sensational or unchaste; it has been chiefly sympathetic and educational, sincere throughout and altruistic in spirit; serious always, if anything, too serious,

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lacking vivacity, unbending—as is Russian life itself—meaning the life of the millions and millions, not that of a thin layer of city idlers imitating "the West," and after the manner of imitators, taking the worst of their model and leaving out the good. This, by the way, applies to much of the sensational fiction of these latter days, too often glaringly brutal and licentious.

The main difficulty to be encountered in the selection of material for the present set lies in the comparative scarcity, up to a recent date, of really short stories. Most of our best writers have shorter stories, which, on their merits, it would be desirable to include, but they are not short enough,—they would go as *novelettes*. A selection of such stories might at some future time form an interesting separate collection.

After Tchekhof, there is no lack of material. The abortive revolution of 1905, the Japanese war, the present war, and the present revolution yield an inexhaustible mine, in which,

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however, comparatively few nuggets repay a long and tedious search.

Here again the recent rush of translations from the Russian make it difficult to avoid "overlapping" in the choice of stories, since it is impossible, in the number, to know exactly which have already figured in the lists of published translations.

For the present it is the editor's object and hope to present American readers with a selection which may not only prove acceptable in itself, but reveal to them some less familiar aspects of Russian thought and character and so help to complete their conception of this richly and variously gifted race.

Z. RAGOZIN.

PETROGRAD,

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N. S. Lesskof

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Nicolas Stepànovitch Lesskof

1831–1895

LESSKOF, whose writings bear the stamp of great originality in thought and form, was destined to suffer obloquy and almost persecution, for his convictions, not, however, on the part of the government, but on that of progressive, radical Russia.

A native of the province of Orlof, he was the son of a priest who had been ennobled for services rendered in public life. His mother belonged to an old noble family. He grew up in the house of a wealthy uncle (his mother's brother) and visited the "gymnasium" of the city of Orlof, but was forced to leave before graduating, because his father's sudden death, followed by a fire which destroyed their entire property, left him destitute. At the age of seventeen he obtained a situation as copyist in the provincial criminal court, but was soon promoted to the post of secretary to the board of conscription in Kief. In the course of his duties he had to travel much in the province, and that gave him an opportunity to study the life of the people. In 1857 he left public service and took up a position as manager of large estates, and in 1860 his first timid attempts at literary work were published in sundry magazines. In 1861 he migrated to Petersburg, settled there, and devoted himself entirely to literature.

He made friends of two fiery political agents, the Englishman Arthur Benny and the Little Russian Nitchiporènko, who died a prisoner in the Petropavlofsky fortress. Lesskof and his friends contributed to *The Bee of the North* (a daily paper). In the summer of 1862 Petersburg was visited by a dire calamity; a

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series of great conflagrations breaking out in the most populous parts of the city and laid by the populace to the charge of the nihilist students; and notwithstanding that Lesskof, by spoken and written word, strenuously protested against this slanderous accusation, the "progressive" part of society turned from him and branded him as a partisan of serfdom, a spy and informer and a paid agent of the government.

Lesskof then went abroad, determined to write and publish the truth concerning the so-called "liberating movement," which a lot of low, immoral people were joining and discrediting. In 1864 appeared his novel *No Thoroughfare* and in 1870–72 another, *At Daggers Drawn*. Thenceforth the gifted writer was definitively committed to the detested ranks of "retregressists."

He next turned his talented pen to the portraying of the clergy, their life and manners. His next novel, *The Cathedral Clergy*, which came out in 1872 was a great success; so were his stories *The Righteous Man* and *Little Stories of Episcopal Life* (1878); but all these later books excited the greatest indignation among the clergy. The Liberals now forgave him for showing up the Nihilists, and the government deprived him of the position which he occupied in the Department of Public Instruction (1883).

In the eighties Lesskof began a series of stories of the early Christian age. His sound judicial mind had a sceptical turn which made him incapable of mystical exaltation. He was a practical Christian, a follower of the social Christ, but not a churchman. He lived a lonely life. His old friends looked on him with distrust; new ones approached him diffidently.

In fertile invention and richness of language he has few rivals in Russian literature, and frequently is well-nigh untranslatable.

S. N. Syron.

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The Simpleton (*Douratchòk*)

By N. S. Lesskof

WHO is to be considered a fool (*dourâk*)? It would seem as though any one might know. Yet, if we compare notes to find out different people's views, it will turn out that no two people's are alike. The academical dictionary, which examines each word in all its acceptations, defines "fool" as follows: a feeble-minded person, imbecile, silly, devoid of reason, a buffoon. The diminutive—*douratchòk*—softens the meaning and may be rendered by "simpleton." This explanation would seem to cover the ground; yet, in real life fools or simpletons are sometimes met, who, while thus termed, are neither silly nor devoid of reason. They are strange creatures, and of one such I intend to tell.

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Lesskof

There was in my native village a homeless orphan boy, a serf, known by the name of Panka. He grew up among the menials of the manor house, wore what he was given, and lived on what food was left from the meals of the woman who tended the cows and her children. His official status was that of "general helper," which means that all those who had any definite duties about the house or grounds had the right to make him do their work, whatever that was, and he was working unceasingly. I seem to see him now before me. In winter time,—and our winters are fierce,—we children would get up and run to the windows, and there would be Panka, bent double, hauling a hand-sled loaded with bundles of hay or straw and baskets with grain and other small feed for cattle and fowls. So that, while we were just rising from our beds, he had already worked himself tired, and it was seldom we could find him snatching a moment's rest in the cow-shed, munching a hunch of bread and

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washing it down with water from a wooden scoop.

Sometimes we would ask him:

"Pray, why do you eat nothing but dry bread?"

"How so, dry?" he would laugh, "isn't this nice pure water, to wet it with?"

"Why don't you ask for some cabbage or a cucumber, or something?"

But he would only shake his head and reply:

"Oh, nonsense. I have eaten my fill, thank the Lord."

Whereupon he would straighten his girdle and go back to work, hauling now one thing, now another. There was no such thing as a surcease of work for him, for everybody called on him to "help." It was he who cleansed the stables and cow-house, who gave the cattle their fodder, who drove the sheep to water; and, of an evening, his day's work done, he would be plaiting bast shoes for himself and others, the last to go to bed and the first to rise, usually before daybreak. He

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was always very poorly and scantily clad. And nobody ever cared; there was always the excuse:

"Oh, he does not mind; he is a simpleton, you know."

"In what way is he a simpleton?"

"In every way."

"For example?"

"What need of examples? There's that woman now: she gives all the cucumbers and potatoes to her children, never one to him. Well, he never asks for anything and does not even complain. The idiot!"

We children, of course, were unable to make out the right or wrong of the matter, and, although we had never heard Panka say anything foolish and could testify to his kindness, for he used to make us little windmills and other toys out of birch bark,—still, hearing everybody in the house call him simpleton, we did so too, and no one disputed it,—and soon something occurred which established the fact beyond dispute.

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The Simpleton

We had a manager, an extremely strict and stern man, who delighted in punishing for the slightest offence. As he drove his sulky about the estate, he used to sweep the place with his glance, looking for something to find fault with, and if anything was wrong anywhere, he would stop short, call the culprit to him, and issue his orders:

"Go this minute to the office and tell the *stárost* (bailiff), in my name, to give you twenty-five stripes, and if you cheat, I will have you punished doubly tonight in my presence."

No one ever dared to beg for pardon, knowing that he hated it and would only increase the punishment.

One day, in summer time, this martinet, on one of his inspecting tours, caught sight of some colts disporting themselves in the young corn, not so much eating as trampling it and tearing up the roots with their hoofs. He was furious.

The duty of looking after the colts had

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been entrusted that summer to Petrùsha, a son of that same dairy-woman Arina who would not spare a potato for Panka, but gave all to her own children. Petrùsha was about twelve years old at the time, but of much smaller and more delicate build than Panka, and the village lads used to tease him and call him milksop, because he was his mother's pet, not inured to work, and a poor fighter. That morning early he had driven the colts out into the dewy meadow, but, feeling chilly, had sat down and wrapped his coat closely around him; then, as he got warm, sleep had stolen upon him, and the colts had strayed into the corn.

The manager, coming upon the scene, struck the lad with his whip and said to him:

"Let Panka attend for a while to both your work and his own, and you go straight to the office and tell the man on duty there to give you twenty stripes. If it is not done before I get home, you shall receive a double dose in my presence."

He spoke and was gone.

Poor Petrùsha stood dissolved in tears; he trembled in every limb, for he had never been punished with rods before. He appealed to Panka.

"Panka, brother dear, I am sore afraid. . . . Tell me, what am I to do?"

Panka patted him on the head, smoothing his hair, and spoke soothingly:

"I too was afraid. But what is to be done? . . . Christ suffered stripes. . . ."

But the lad only wept more desperately and kept repeating:

"I'm afraid! Afraid to go and afraid not to go. . . . Better throw myself into the river."

Panka reasoned and exhorted him long and insistently, but to no purpose, and at last said:

"Well, then, you stop here and attend to both my work and your own, while I run over and see what I can do;—maybe God will take pity on you, seeing you are such a little coward."

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"And what are you going to do about it?" asked Petrùsha.

"Never mind that; I have thought of something. I'll do my best."

He ran across the field, straight to the manor as fast as he could go, and returned in an hour, smiling.

"Do not worry," he said; "I've fixed it all. You need not go. You are not to be punished."

Petrùsha thought: "I suppose I must believe him," and did not go. That evening the manager inquired at the office:

"Did a shepherd boy come here this morning to get a whipping?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did you give it to him?"

"We did all right."

"You laid it on properly?"

"We gave it him good and hot."

So the thing passed over. It was only later that it became known that it was not the shepherd boy who got the whipping, but

Panka. The story got about the house and the village, and everybody had a laugh at Panka. And so Petrùsha escaped.

"Well," people said, "since the fool took it on himself, you cannot well punish the same offence twice."

And now, say, did not our Panka show himself on arrant fool on this occasion?

So he lived on and on, year in and year out.

Some years later the Crimean War broke out, and recruits were levied. A great wail went up in the village; no one is anxious for the hardships and dangers of war. Most of all, mothers lamented over their sons; every mother grudges her boy. Panka by that time had reached man's estate, and one fine day he came into the presence of the master and offered himself:

"Will you, please, order me taken to the city," he said, "to be enrolled as a soldier?"

"What whim is this?" wondered the master.

"Just my fancy," he returned.

"But why? Think twice of it."

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"No," he insisted; "there is no time for thinking."

"No time? What do you mean?"

"Do you not hear them weep and wail all around you? Now there is no one to weep and wail for me,—I am loved only of the Lord. So I want to go."

They tried to talk him out of his resolve.

"Look at yourself," they said, "how uncouth you are. If you go to the war and into battle, people perchance will laugh and make fun of you."

"All the better," he would retort. "Laughing is more fun than quarrelling. Where all are merry, there is peace."

"Be merry by yourself and stay at home," they urged.

But he stood his ground firmly.

"No," he said; "I shall be happier if I go."

So he had his will: he was taken to the city and handed over to the recruiting officers, and when those who took him returned home, they were questioned with much curiosity.

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"Well, and how did you leave our fool?" people asked. "Did you see him afterwards?"

"Indeed we did," they answered.

"Surely everybody is laughing at him over there. Such a clod-hopper as he is!"

"True," they said; "at first they did laugh some. But he spent the two roubles pocket money we had given him on pies which he bought in the market and distributed to his new comrades, one apiece, forgetting no one but himself. Then they began to shake their heads, and broke off pieces to give him. But he acted sort of bashful and said: 'Why, brothers, I did not mean it so. Eat it all and welcome.' Then the recruits patted him and said: 'Well, you *are* a kind soul!' Next morning he was the first in barracks to get up and started cleaning up and blacking the old soldiers' boots. They praised him, and asked us: 'Was he not something of a fool at home?' We answered: 'Not exactly a fool . . . just a bit simple.' "

And so Panka, with all his foolishness,

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served through the entire war, working in the rear of the army, digging ditches, burying every kind of filth,—and when he got his discharge, habituated as he was to herding, he hired himself out to Tatar horse breeders in the great eastern and south-eastern steppes, to tend their droves of horses.

He started for the steppes from the city of Penza and it was many years before he came back. He ranged the steppes after the horses, in their remotest parts, bordering on the waterless sand wilderness, where the wealthy local magnate Khan-Djangar lived after true nomad fashion. This chieftain, when he came within the bounds of civilization, to sell his horses, was tame enough while there; but out in his own domains his will was his only law; in his treatment of men he was guided solely by whim: he was good to those who took his fancy, a fiend to those who displeased him.

Owing to the remoteness of the wilderness where he roamed at will, it was impossible for the authorities to keep track of him and

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his doings, and his savage licence knew no restraint. But he was not alone of his kind; there were others who equalled him in lawlessness, and one of these, a most daring thief, named Habiboula, repeatedly got away with many of his very finest horses, emboldened by long impunity. But one day it came to a regular fight, in which Habiboula was wounded and taken. This happened at a time when Khan-Djangar was in a hurry to get to the horse fair at Penza, and he could not stop to go through the formality of "trying" the horse thief, whom he intended to put to death with such refinement of torture as should fill all other thieves with terror.

In order not to be late at Penza and not to show himself with Habiboula in places where there were Russian authorities, Khan-Djangar resolved to leave Panka with one horse by a small and scanty spring, in charge of the wounded prisoner, fettered with horse shackles. He left some wheat and a skin of water for their support, with the strict injunction:

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"Guard this man as you would your own soul. Understand?"

To which Panka replied:

"How should I not? I thoroughly understand and will do exactly as you say."

Khan-Djangar rode away with his entire band. Then Panka entered into conversation with Habiboula.

"See," he began, "to what your thieving has brought you. You are such a fine, brave fellow, but all your bravery has brought you no good. You should amend."

The robber replied:

"If I did not amend before, there is no time now."

"How so, no time? All that is needed is that a man should have the firm will to amend; the rest will come of itself. . . . You have a soul, the same as all men have; cast out of it all that is evil, and God will at once begin to help you do that which is good, and all will be well."

Habiboula listened and sighed.

"No," he said, "it is no use thinking of such things at this pass."

"Why not at this pass?"

"Why, because I am fettered and waiting for death."

"But I'm going to unfetter you and let you go."

Habiboula could not believe his ears; but Panka looked at him with his kind smile and assured him:

"I am not speaking in jest, I am in earnest. The Khan told me to guard you as I would my own soul. Do you know how a man should guard his soul? He should not, my brother, take thought of his soul to keep it from harm, but let it suffer for others, to keep *them* from harm. And that is what I intend to do this day, for I cannot endure to have men hurt others. I will unfetter you and let you take the horse, and you go your way, wherever you hope for safety; and if, after this, you again do evil, you will be deceiving not me, but the Lord."

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With these words he squatted down on the ground and broke the shackles from Habiboula, then made him mount, and said to him:

"Go in peace to any of the four quarters."

And he remained, to wait for Khan-Djangar's return; he waited very long until the tiny spring dried up and but a very little water was left in the skin.

Then at last Khan-Djangar returned with his band.

The Khan looked around.

"Where is Habiboula?"

Panka made answer:

"I let him go."

"What! let him go? What is that you are telling me?"

"I am telling you what I have actually done, in accordance with your command and my own will. You ordered me to guard him as I would my own soul, and the way I guard my soul is to let it suffer for my neighbour. You intended to torture Habiboula.

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Well, I cannot endure to have people hurt. You are welcome to take me and torture me, and my soul shall be happy and free from all fear, for I do not fear you or anybody, not the least little bit."

Khan-Djangar's eyes rolled from side to side. He straightened his cap on his head, then turned to his people.

"Come nearer, all of you, I will tell you what I think."

The men all pressed around him, and he spoke in subdued tones:

"It seems to me that Panka may not be put to death, for that, mayhap, an angel has dwelt in his soul."

"Yes," came the low-voiced response from all the men; "we may not hurt him. We have not understood him these many years, and now, in one instant, he stands declared before us; he is a righteous soul."

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The Pearl Necklace

By N. S. Lesskof

I

SOME three years ago my brother came up from one of the provinces, where he held some official post, to visit us and to spend the Christmas holidays, and,—Heaven knows what possessed him,—straightway attacked me and my wife, and gave us no peace, insisting that we should "help him to get married."

At first we thought he was joking, but he most seriously and unremittingly plied us with his one request:

"For goodness' sake, help me to get married. Save me from the insufferable tedium of loneliness. I am sick and tired of a bachelor's existence, of provincial gossip and fiddle-

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faddle; I want a home of my own; I want to sit evenings with a dear wife by my own lamp. Do find me a wife."

"But just wait a bit," we would say; "that's all very fine, and may you get your heart's desire, bless you. But these things require time; one must have a nice girl in view, one that would suit you, and at the same time feel well disposed towards you herself. And all this takes time."

To which he would reply:

"Well, there is plenty of time. During the two holiday weeks no marriages can take place; so I have a whole fortnight before me. Enough for courtship, and one fine evening, immediately after Twelfth Night, we will be married and depart."

"Heigh-ho," say I, "seems to me, my dear boy, you really are going crazy with the tedium of it" (the word "psychopath" was not yet in use at the time). "I have no leisure to fool around with you just now; I am going to the court in a minute, where I have

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a case; but you can stay here with my wife and build all the castles you want to."

I thought, of course, it was all nonsense, or, anyhow, a whim very remote from fulfilment; when I came home to dinner, I could see that they had it all planned.

Says my wife to me:

"Máshinka Vassilief was here. Asked me to go with her to choose a frock, and, while I was dressing, they" (meaning my brother and the young lady), "took tea together, and your brother afterwards said to me: 'That's a lovely girl. What's the use of hunting around? Go ahead and marry us.'"

To which I replied:

"Now I see my brother really is crazy."

"Come now," she replied, "why crazy? Why deny that which you have always stood up for?"

"What do you mean? What did I stand up for?"

"Unaccountable sympathy; heart affinities."

"Tut-tut, my dear," I said, "I am not to be taken in with such catchwords. That is all very well at the proper time, on a reasonable basis. Inclination must spring out of something real and tangible, such as the recognition of superior qualities of heart and soul. But this! What do you call this? Too sudden. A glance, a word,—and straightway 'marry us,' and there you are—for life."

"And, pray, what objection have you against Máshinka? She is just such as you describe,—a clear-headed girl of a noble disposition, a good and faithful heart. And besides, she liked him well too."

"What!" I exclaimed: "so you lost no time in securing a confession from her as well?"

"Confession nothing," she retorted; "as if one could not see. Love, you know, is woman's province,—we know it in the bud."

"You are all disgustingly fond of match-making," I grumbled. . . . "All you care

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for is to get two people married, and what comes of it is no concern of yours. You had better beware of the consequences of your rash interference."

"I am afraid of nothing," she asserted, "because I know them both. I know your brother is a splendid fellow, and Masha is a lovely girl, and, once they have pledged their word to take care of each other's happiness, they will surely redeem their pledge."

"What!" I cried, aghast, "they are already engaged?"

"Well, not formally as yet but it is plain enough. Their tastes, their ideas are alike. Anyhow I shall take your brother over there tonight; I am sure the old people will like him, and then. . . ."

"Well, what then?"

"Then, let them manage things themselves; only don't you meddle."

"All right," I said; "I am only too glad not to be mixed up in such silly doings."

"There won't be anything silly about it."

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"Very well."

"Everything will get along beautifully; they will be very happy."

"Glad to hear it. Only you might as well, you and my dear brother, bear in mind the fact that Máshinka's father is a well-known wealthy churl and miser."

"What of that? I am sorry to say I cannot deny the fact, but that does not prevent Máshinka from being a lovely girl who will develop into an excellent wife. You surely are forgetting a fact on which we have often dwelt; namely, that all of Turgenief's finest women had anything but admirable parents."

"That is not at all what I mean. Máshinka is indeed an admirable girl, but, when both her elder sisters married, her father tricked his sons-in-law,—gave them nothing. She won't get anything either."

"How do we know? He loves her best of the three."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear! As if we did not know what this exceeding love for a mar-

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riageable daughter amounts to. He'll cheat 'em all. Moreover, he can't help himself. That's his way. He is said to have built up his fortune by lending out money at outrageous interest. And of such a man you expect love and generosity? Mind my word: his sons-in-law themselves are as smart as they make them, yet he was too much for them, and now they are not on speaking terms with him. What chance then would that brother of mine have, who, from his childhood up has been noted for exaggerated delicacy of feeling in money matters! He will be stranded high and dry."

"High and dry? You mean? . . ."

"Come, come, stop fooling."

"I'm not fooling."

"As if you did not know what it means to be 'stranded high and dry!' He won't give Masha a thing, that's all."

"Oh, is that it!"

"Why, of course."

"'Of course,' do you say? Well, that

may be," she mocked; "only it never occurred to me that getting a good wife, even if dowerless, meant, in your estimation, being 'stranded high and dry.'"

You know the pretty feminine way and their logic: hitting you one in passing when aiming a stone at a neighbour's garden.

"I was not speaking for myself."

"Oh, it comes to the same thing."

"You speak strangely, my dear, I must say."

"Why 'strangely'?"

"Because, I repeat, I was not speaking for myself!"

"Then you thought it."

"No; I did not."

"Well, you imagined it."

"No, no, devil take it all! I did not imagine any such thing either."

"Now what's the use of shouting? . . ."

"I'm not shouting."

"And bringing in the devil! So nice, isn't it!"

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"You put me out of patience."

"There, you see? Were I rich and had brought you a dowry. . . ."

"Oh, bother!"

That was more than I could stand. I assumed an injured mien—for I really felt ill used,—and, shaking my head, I turned on my heel and made for my own den. But, after I had closed the door behind me, I was seized with an irresistible desire for revenge; so I opened it again and relieved my feelings with the one word:

"Pig!"

"Thanks, my dear husband!" came the answer.

II

Nice scene, was it not? After four years of the happiest married life, never for a minute troubled or obscured! Too bad! Intolerable! Such nonsense, too! And for what? All my brother's doing! What business is it of mine, that I should work myself

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into such a tantrum? After all, he is no kid, and surely is entitled to judge for himself whom he likes and wishes to marry. My Lord! you cannot nowadays direct your own son in such matters; how then expect a brother to be guided by you? And, besides, what right have I to interfere? And am I really endowed with such prophetic power as to foretell, infallibly, what the result of his courtship is to be? . . . Máshinka is unquestionably a lovely girl, and is not my wife a lovely woman? . . . Nor has anybody, yet, thank Heaven, called *me* a worthless member of society; yet here we are, after four years of unclouded married happiness, quarelling and calling each other names like a fishmonger and his wife. And all for nothing; on account of a foolish fellow's vagaries! . . .

I felt terribly ashamed of myself and guilty before my wife. For, in my penitent mood, I thought nothing of her hard words and blamed myself alone, and in this saddened and discontented state of mind I went to

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sleep in my own den, on the divan, wrapped in my warm, cozy dressing-gown, quilted by my dear wife's own hands.

What a gratefully enfolding thing that is,—a comfortable garment, worked by a wife for her husband! It is so nice and soft and dear, and so gently, at any and all times, recalls our offences and those precious little hands, which we suddenly long to kiss and kiss, asking pardon, we could not exactly tell for what!

"Forgive me, my angel, for that—thou hast provoked me out of all patience. I'll be good!"

I confess I was in such a hurry to apologize and make friends, that I awoke, got up, and came out of my den. And behold—all the rooms were dark and silent.

"Where is your mistress?" I inquired of the maid.

"Gone with your brother to call on Maria Nicolaevna and her father. I'll get your tea in a minute."

"Did you ever!" I thought to myself.

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"Evidently she has not given up her stubbornness and has set her heart on this marriage. Well, let them! Let the girl's father treat the boy as he has treated his older sons-in-law. And he will,—even worse, for those are sharp customers, while my brother is honesty incarnate and full of nice scruples. Let the old man teach him a lesson,—him and my wife. Let her burn her fingers on this her first attempt at match-making."

I received my tea at the hands of the maid and sat down to study the case which was scheduled for the morrow on the court calendar and which was fraught with not a few difficulties.

This work absorbed my attention until far after midnight. My wife and my brother came home at two o'clock, both in the highest spirits.

"Won't you have some cold roast beef and a glass of water with claret?" said my wife to me. "As for us, we had supper with the Vassiliefs."

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"No, thanks," I answered curtly.

"Nicolaï Ivánovitch was in a generous mood and feasted us royally."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. We had a delightful time. There was champagne."

"Good for you!" I said, and at the same time was thinking: "The old rascal at once got my brother's number, and, seeing what a calf he had to deal with, began by giving him a nice feed; then he will pet him so long as the courtship lasts, after which the young ox will find himself stalled."

I felt again embittered against my wife and did not apologize for being ill used by her. Had I been free and had I had the leisure to enter into all the possibilities of the love-game they started, I might very possibly have yielded once more to the temptation and interfered, and things might have ended in a general mix-up; but, fortunately, I did not have the time. The case which I mentioned a while ago kept us so busy in court, that we

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hardly expected to have done with it by Christmas, so that I came home only for meals and a night's rest, spending all my days and part of my nights before the altar of the blindfolded goddess. Meanwhile, things did not wait on my pleasure at home. When I at last sought my own hearth on the night of Christmas Eve, delighted to be rid for a time of professional work, I was met by the request to examine a wonderful basket filled with rich presents, my brother's offering to his bride to be.

"What in the world is this?"

"The bridegroom's gifts," explained my wife.

"It's all settled then? Congratulations."

"Certainly. Your brother did not wish formally to propose before he had one more talk with you, but he is in a hurry to get the wedding over, and, just as though to spite us, that horrid court of yours kept you so busy, it was impossible to get hold of you. They could not wait any longer, and so became engaged."

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"Why, that's all right," I said; "there was no use waiting for me."

"Are you making fun of us?"

"Not in the least."

"Then you are sarcastic."

"Not a bit of it."

"Moreover, you would be wasting your breath, for, in spite of your croaking, they are going to be extremely happy."

"Naturally, since you vouch for it," I retorted. "There is a saying to the effect that 'whoso thinks but three days makes a bad choice. It is safest not to choose at all.'"

"Well," replied my wife, shutting down the lid of the basket,—"it is you men who think you always choose us. In reality, all that is nonsense."

"How so—nonsense? It is not the girls, I should hope, who do the courting, but the men."

"The courting—true, the men do that. But it is never preceded by genuine, deliberate, intelligent choice."

I shook my head and attempted to reason with her.

"You should think better of what you say. Take me now: I chose you out of regard for you and fully realizing your excellent qualities."

"Don't fib."

"Fib?"

"Certainly. You did not choose me for my excellent qualities at all."

"For what then?"

"For my looks."

"What! You go to the length of denying your own good qualities?"

"Not at all. I have some very good ones, but all the same you would not have married me, had you not liked my looks."

I felt that she was right, but persisted.

"Still," I said, "I was hanging round your house for a year, waiting. What did I do that for?"

"To look at me."

"You are mistaken. I was studying you."

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She burst out laughing.

"It is silly to laugh at nothing."

"I'm not laughing at nothing. I'm laughing because you never studied me, my dear, and could not study me."

"Why could I not?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Please."

"Because you were in love with me."

"Granted. But that did not prevent me from realizing your moral qualities."

"It did."

"No, it did not."

"And I say it did, and always will prevent any lover from 'studying' a girl; therefore it is a waste of time. You men think that, having fallen in love with a woman, *you look at her with discrimination*, while the fact is that *you look at her with your imagination*."

"Well, well," I said, rather taken aback,—"isn't that somewhat too . . . too realistic?" . . . But to myself I thought: "She is right, confound her!"

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My wife went on:

"Come now, stop worrying. . . . There's no harm done. And now hurry up and dress and let us be off to the Vassiliefs'; we are invited for the evening and you are to offer your congratulations to your brother and his fiancée."

"I will, gladly."

And we went.

III

The gifts were duly presented, congratulations offered, and we all drank ourselves merry on the nectar of fair champagne.

Talking, arguing, advising, were out of the question, the time for that was past and nothing remained but to uphold in every one the belief in the happiness awaiting the engaged couple and to drink more champagne, and in these occupations were spent the days and the nights, alternately at our house and at the Vassiliefs'.

People thus engaged take no notice of the flight of time.

Before we could realize it New Year's Eve was upon us. At such a time expectations grow into certainties; joy and good wishes are the order of the day, and in this we were not behind the rest. We saw the old year out and the new in at Máshinka's house, and there were such doings there as would have justified King (*kniaz*) Vladimir's famous saying that "Drinking is Russia's joy." One thing, however, was not in keeping with tradition. Máshinka's father said not a word of a dowry, but made his daughter an exceedingly strange present,—one, as I learned later, absolutely inadmissible on such an occasion, because considered of most evil omen. In full sight of the crowd, at supper, with his own hands he placed round her neck a magnificent pearl necklace. We men looking at the thing, thought: "Why, that's fine! What may it have cost, though? He must have saved the pretty toy since the

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good old times when rich people did not yet send their valuables to public loan-banks, but, when hard up for cash, preferred to entrust them to private money-lenders of old Vassilief's stamp."

The pearls were large, round, and of purest sheen, arranged in an old-fashioned, peculiarly effective style,—the smaller ones at the back, gradually increasing in size, up to that of a bean, with three enormous black pearls of most perfect brilliancy in front. This beautiful, valuable gift totally eclipsed my brother's, which looked quite shamefaced by the side of it. In a word, all of us men highly approved of the father's gift, and we also liked the short speech which accompanied it:

"Here, little daughter, is a pretty bauble with a spell on it: rot will not attack it, nor thief steal it, or, if one did, he would have no pleasure of it. It is a joy for ever."

But women have their own way of looking at things, and Máshinka, on receiving the

necklace, burst into tears. As for my wife, she could not control herself, and, taking the old gentleman to a window, actually read him a lecture, to which, as coming from a new-found relative, he was compelled to listen: did he not know that pearls symbolize and foretell tears and therefore should never be given as either a New Year's or a wedding gift?

He passed the matter over lightly, with a jest.

"In the first place," he said, "they are all idle prejudices, and if anybody will make me a present of the famous pearl which Princess Yussupof bought of Gorgubus, I'll take it at once. I, too, madam, in my time, have gone into all these subtleties and know what may or may not be given. A maiden should not be given turquoises, because turquoises, according to a Persian superstition, are the bones of persons who have died of love. Married ladies should not be given amethysts *avec flèches d'amour;* nevertheless, I have tried

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the experiment of giving such amethysts, and the ladies took them. . . ."

My wife smiled. He continued:

"I shall repeat the experiment with you. As regards pearls, you must know that not all are obtained with tears. There are the pearls of the Red Sea, those of the Persian Gulf, but there are also sweet-water pearls—*perles d'eau douce,*—which cost no tears. Sentimental Mary Stuart would wear no pearls but those from Scotland's streams, but they do not seem to have brought her happiness. I know what may be given, and that I give my daughter, and you—you frighten her. To punish you I shall not, after all, give you amethysts *avec flèches d'amour;* I will give you instead the frigid moonstone. . . . And you, my child, do not cry, and dismiss from your mind the idea that my pearls will bring you tears. They are not that kind. The day after your wedding I shall reveal to you the secret of these pearls, and you will see that you have no cause for superstitious fears."

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Thus the trouble was laid. My brother and Máshinka were married immediately after Twelfth Night, and on the following morning my wife and I paid them our first visit.

IV

We found them up and in the gayest spirits. My brother himself opened the door of the suite which he had engaged in a hotel and met us with beaming face and laughing boisterously.

This put me in mind of an old novel, in which the young husband goes mad with excess of happiness, and I told him so; to which he replied:

"What do you think? My own experience is such that this very thing might easily happen to me. My married life, beginning this day, has already brought me, besides the expected joys of wedlock, a great surprise on the part of my dear wife's father."

"Why, what else has happened to you?"

"Come in and I'll tell you."

"Some trick of that old blackguard," whispered my wife to me.

"None of my business," I replied.

We went in, and my brother handed me a postal which had come by the morning's mail. It read as follows:

"*The superstition about pearls can have no terror for you: the pearls are false.*"

My wife was stunned. She just sat down.

"The old scoundrel!" she cried.

But my brother nodded warningly in the direction of the adjoining bedroom, where Máshinka was completing her toilet.

"You are wrong," he said. "The old man has acted most honourably. When I read this, I had to laugh. What have I to grieve about? I did not seek or ask for a dowry. I wanted only a wife; consequently it is immaterial to me that the pearls are not real. Suppose this necklace is worth not thirty thousand roubles, but only three hundred, what is that to me, so my wife is happy?

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One thing alone worried me: how to break it to Masha. So I sat down to think it over with my face to the window, forgetting that I had omitted to close the door. A few minutes later I looked round, and there, behind me, stood my father-in-law, holding in his hand something wrapped in a handkerchief.

"'Good-morning, son,' he said.

"I jumped up, embraced him, and said:

"'How nice of you! We were going to look you up in an hour or so, and here you are yourself. . . . That is contrary to all customs . . . all the nicer and dearer.'

"'Bother etiquette,' he said. 'We're family. I was at mass, sent up a prayer for both of you, and see: I have brought you a *prosforà*.[1]'

"We embraced again, and kissed.

[1] The *prosforà* is the small, white unleavened communion loaf out of which tiny particles are cut and dropped in the wine of the communion cup.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

"'Did you receive my postal?' he inquired.

"'Oh yes, I did.'

"And I laughed. He looked at me awhile.

"'So you're laughing, are you?'

"'What else should I do? It's too amusing.'

"'Amusing?'

"'Certainly.'

"'Let me see the pearls.'

"They were lying on the table, in their case. I handed it to him.

"'Have you got a magnifying glass?' he demanded.

"I had not and said so.

"'Then I have. I always carry one about me. It is an old habit. Now I want you to look at the clasp, just below the catch.'

"'Why should I?'

"'Never mind. You just look. Maybe you think I have deceived you.'

"'No such thing.'

"'Well, look,—just look.'

"I took the glass. There on the clasp,

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cunningly concealed, in microscopic French script, stood the name: '*Bourguillon.*'

"'Are you convinced,' he asked, 'that these are, indeed and truly, *false* pearls?'

"'Quite.'

"'And what will you say to me *now?*'

"'I shall repeat what I said before. That is . . . speaking for myself. Only I should like to ask a favour of you. . . .'

"'Go ahead.'

"'Will you allow me not to tell Masha?'

"'What's that for?'

"'A fancy of mine.'

"'No, but tell me what's the idea? To spare her a disappointment?'

"'Well, yes; partly that.'

"'And what else?'

"'I do not wish the least bitter feeling to stir in her heart against her father.'

"'Against her father?'

"'Yes.'

"'As to that, she is now with regard to her father as a slice cut off the loaf, that never

will grow back to the loaf. No one now matters to her but her husband. . . . '

"'That is all wrong!' I cried. 'The heart is not a wayside inn; there is always room and to spare. A child's love is one thing, a wife's is another. Besides, a husband, if he wishes to be happy, has to see to it that he can respect his wife, and with that object in view, he must guard her love and veneration for her parents.'

"'A-ah! Is that the kind of chap you are?'

"And he began silently to drum with his fingers on the table. Then he rose and said:

"'I, my dear son, have made my money by hard work, but in many different ways. From a lofty point of view these ways, perhaps, may not all have been very praiseworthy, but such were the times, nor did I know any others. I have no great faith in men, and love I know only from novels, the few I've read; but from what I saw in real life I gathered that everybody is after money. To my two sons-in-law I gave no money, so

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they are mad at me and do not allow their wives to visit me. I don't know who is the nobler—they or I. I refuse them lifeless money, but they,—they corrupt live hearts. And money I will not give them; but to you I will. Yes. And no later than now, this minute.'

"Here—see that?" My brother showed us three bills of fifty thousand roubles each.

"You don't say!" I cried. "All for your wife?"

"No," he replied. "He gave her fifty thousand; but I said to him: 'Do you know, Nicolaï Ivánovitch,—that will be awkward. . . . Masha will feel uncomfortable taking this money while her sisters are left out. It will inevitably be a source of envy and enmity. . . . No, God forbid. Keep the money and some day, when some favourable occasion reconciles you to your other daughters, you will, maybe, give it to all, share and share alike. Then there will be joy for all. But for us alone—no, no!'

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"He again rose, paced the room awhile, stopped before the bedroom door, and called out: 'Maria!'

"My wife came out in her pretty morning wrapper.

"'I wish you joy,' he said.

"She kissed his hand.

"'Do you want to be happy?'

"'Of course, I do, Papa, and I hope . . .'

"'That's right. You have chosen a good husband.'

"'I did not choose him, Papa. God gave him to me.'

"'Very well, very well. God gave him, and I will add something to His gift; I wish to complete your happiness. Here are three bills, all alike. One is for you, the other two are for your sisters. You shall give them to them. And tell them they are *your gift*.'

"Masha could but cry out 'Papa!' and first threw her arms round his neck, then, with a sudden impulse, slid down to the floor, embracing his knees and crying happy tears.

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I looked at him,—there were tears in his eyes too.

"'Rise, rise,' he said. 'You are "queen"[1] this day by ancient popular decree and it is not meet you should kneel to me.'

"'But I am so happy . . . for my sisters!'

"'I know. So am I. You can see now that you had no reason to be afraid of my pearl necklace. I came here to reveal to you

[1] To this day, among the peasantry, especially in remoter parts, a bride and groom on their wedding day are addressed and spoken of as king and queen (*kniaz* and *kniaginia*). The immediate occasion is the fact that, during the marriage ceremony (which can be performed only in church), ornamental gilt crowns are placed on their heads, or held above them. Hence the ceremony is called crowning or "coronation," and to be married "is to be crowned." But the real origin of the custom lies far deeper and antecedes Christianity. It goes back to the heathen Slavic times of partriarchal tribe rule, when every new couple could be the founders and, as such, the rulers of a tribe. The old wedding songs, preserved by folk-lore and still in use, all celebrate—"*glorify*"—the *kniaz* and *kniaginia*. Since the coming of Rurik only his male descendants have borne the title of *kniaz* which was theirs by right of birth.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

a secret: *the pearls I gave you are false.* A long time ago I was taken in with them by a dear friend of mine. And what a friend! Not one of common clay; a descendant of Rurik and the great Gedimin of Lithuania, if you please! Your husband now, he is a simple soul, but *true.* One cannot trick the like of him,—no man would have the heart!'"

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Friends

A Christmas Story

By N. S. Lesskof

I

MY father was a prominent criminal lawyer in his day. A number of important cases were entrusted to him, and, for that reason, he was frequently absent from his family, leaving my mother alone at home with me and the servants. My mother was very young at the time, and I was just a little chap, seven years old, when the incident took place, of which I intend to tell.

It was winter, and a severe one. The cold was so intense that sheep froze to death at night in their stalls, and sparrows and jackdaws dropped on the frozen ground, stiff and numb. My father was again absent on

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professional business and did not promise to be home even for Christmas, wherefore my mother made up her mind to join him, so that he might not feel lonely and deserted on that day of universal rejoicing. It was quite a long journey, and she would not take me along on account of the terrible cold, but left me with her sister, my aunt, who was married to an estate owner of the same province, whose name was the subject of much unpleasant talk. He was old, very rich, and cruel. His chief characteristics were a certain wicked malignancy and inexorability,—qualities which he not only did not in the least deprecate, but rather prided himself on, as proofs, in his opinion, of manly strength of mind and an inflexible spirit.

These same qualities he strove to develop in his children, one of whom, a boy, was of an age with myself.

Everybody was afraid of my uncle, and I most of all, owing to his determination of developing such "manliness" in me as well.

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On one occasion, when I was not more than three years old, there was a violent thunder-storm, and my uncle, knowing that I was mortally afraid of it, shut me out alone on a balcony, thinking to cure me in this way of my unmanly fear.

Naturally, I was a most unwilling and greatly scared guest in the house of such a host, but I repeat I was only seven years old, and my wishes were not considered when discussing the circumstances which had to be conformed to.

My uncle's residence was a huge stone mansion, resembling a castle, a pretentious, but unharmonious, even ugly two-story construction, with a round cupola and a tower, of which blood-curdling horrors were told. It had once been tenanted by the present owner's demented father. After his demise his rooms were converted into a pharmacy. This, too, was, for some reason, thought dreadful; but the most horrid thing of all was that in the upper room of the

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tower there was an empty dormer-window, and in that window strings were stretched, making a so-called "Æolian harp." When the wind's invisible fingers ran along that peculiar instrument, the strings unexpectedly gave forth the weirdest sounds, rising from a low, deep drone to wild, confused moanings ending in an angry rumble, as from the passing of a flight of fear-stricken, hunted ghosts. Everybody hated this aerial harp, under the impression that it had a message for the redoubtable lord of the manor, who dared not reply, but only grew more merciless and cruel. . . . It was observed beyond a doubt that, if the night had been stormy and the humming of the harp so loud as to reach the village across the pond and the park, the master did not sleep all night, arose in the morning more than usually morose and gloomy and was sure to issue some cruel decree which filled with terror the hearts of his numerous menials.

It was a rule of the house that not the

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slightest transgression should ever go unpunished, no matter who the culprit might be. This rule was never broken, in the case not only of a human being, but even that of an animal, whether a beast of the forest or of the domestic group. My uncle would not hear of mercy; indeed he detested this quality, looking on it as an unmanly weakness. Inflexible severity, in his eyes, was superior to any condescension. Accordingly, a pall of cheerless despondency for ever hung over men and animals alike in all the vast domains belonging to this wealthy landholder.

II

My late uncle was a passionate hunter. He used to hunt wolves, hares, and foxes with greyhounds. Besides these he had in his kennels a special breed of bear-hunting dogs. They went by the name of "leeches." Once such a dog got its fangs into a bear, it hung on so, it was impossible to wrench it off. It

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sometimes happened that the bear would kill it with one blow of his formidable paw, or tear it in two, but never was a "leech" known to let go of its hold alive. Nowadays, when bears are either stalked or hunted single-handed with stakes, this breed of dogs, I believe, has become extinct in Russia; but, at the time of which I am telling, they were to be found in almost every well-appointed hunting kennel. Bears were very plentiful in our parts at that time, and hunting them was a favourite sport.

When the hunters succeeded in getting possession of a whole bear's den, the cubs were taken out and brought home. They were usually kept in a large stone shed with a row of small windows right under the roof. These windows were unglazed, but provided with strong iron bars. The cubs used to reach them by climbing up on top of one another and to cling to the bars by the iron-like claws of their strong paws. This was the only way in which they could, from their

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place of confinement, obtain a glimpse of God's free world. When we were taken out to walk before dinner, our greatest pleasure was to visit the shed and to look from below at the cubs' funny black muzzles sticking out between the bars. The German tutor, Kolberg, contrived to get up to them, at the end of his walking stick, bits of bread which we used to save from our lunch for that purpose.

The duty of looking after the bears and feeding them was entrusted to a young whipper-in named Therapont. I remember him very well. He was a middle-sized, well-built, bold, and powerful fellow of twenty-five or so. He was considered handsome: white-skinned and rosy-cheeked, with black, curly hair and large, black, somewhat protruding eyes; add to this uncommon courage. He had a sister, Anna, who was assistant nurse, and she used to tell us very entertaining stories of her brother's reckless bravery, of the extraordinary friendship existing between

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him and the bears, of how he slept winter and summer with them in their shed, and how they would surround him on all sides and lay their heads upon him, using him as a pillow.

In front of the house, on the other side of a large round plot planted with flowers and enclosed in an ornamental fence, there was a wide gateway, and over against that, in the centre of the plot, rose a tall, straight, smoothly planed pole, or "mast," as it was called, and at the top of it was constructed a small platform.

It was an established custom to select one "clever" cub out of the number of captives,—distinguished by greater intelligence and steadiness of temper, who then was separated from his compeers and allowed to live at liberty, *i. e.*, he was allowed to move freely about the yard and grounds. At the same time he was expected to do sentry duty by the pole opposite the gateway. Here he spent most of his time, either lying on straw at the foot of the pole, or else climbing up to the

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platform and there sitting, or even sleeping, safe from bothering dogs or people.

Not all bears led such a privileged existence, but only such as were particularly gentle and well-behaved, and only so long as they did not manifest their ferocious instincts, incompatible with life in a well-ordered community, *i. e.*, so long as they behaved themselves and did not molest either chickens or geese, calves or humans. The bear that had disturbed the public peace was at once condemned to death, and from this sentence there was no appeal—nothing could save the culprit from execution.

III

The duty of selecting a "clever" bear devolved on Therapont. Naturally, as, on account of his constant intercourse with the cubs, he was credited with an intimate knowledge of their several natures and ways and therefore considered as the only competent

judge. On the other hand, he alone would have been held responsible for a bad choice. But his very first choice fell on an uncommonly intelligent and well-mannered animal, exceptional in every way, even to its name. While Russian bears usually are called "Mishka," this one, for some unknown reason, was given a theatrical Spanish name: he was christened "Sganarelle." Five whole years he had lived at full liberty and never once been "naughty." When a bear was said to have been "naughty," it meant that he had manifested his wild beast's nature, by perpetrating some attack on man or beast. The culprit was then kept for a time in a pit, which had been dug for the purpose in a spacious field between the barn and the wood. After a while a stout beam was lowered into the pit and when, with its help, he clambered out, he was met by a number of "young leeches," *i. e.*, half grown bear-hunting dogs, which were set on the animal. If they could not quite manage him and there was danger

of his escaping into the forest, two of the best huntsmen, concealed in an ambush, rushed out with a picked, tried pack, and quickly made an end of him.

If, by any chance, the dogs did their work so awkwardly that the bear succeeded in "breaking through" and made for the wood, which adjoined one of the vastest forests of central Russia, his way was intercepted by a specially appointed, skilful marksman, armed with an old-fashioned, long, and heavy carbine, who fired from a rest, with deadly aim.

No bear was ever known to escape all these dangers. Indeed, one shudders only to imagine such a possibility and the punishment, even unto death, which would have overtaken all concerned in so untoward a failure.

IV

Owing to Sganarelle's exemplary behaviour, there had been no baiting for five whole years, so that he had grown into a fine, big

bear, uncommonly handsome, powerful, and alert. He was noted for his short, round muzzle and a certain litheness of build, which made him look more like a colossal poodle than a bear. His hindquarters were rather lean and covered with short, shiny fur, but on the shoulders and the back of his neck it was long and shaggy. By his cleverness Sganarelle also put one in mind of a poodle, and some of his ways were rather remarkable for an animal of his species. He was fond of walking upright, on his hind-feet, which he did well and with ease; he could beat a drum, march with a big stick, painted to simulate a gun; he also willingly, and even with evident pleasure, helped the peasants haul the heaviest sacks to the mill, and he had a most ludicrous trick of clapping on his own head a tall, conical felt hat, such as peasants wear, with a peacock's feather stuck in it, or a bunch of straw, which gave this head-dress a ridiculous plumage effect.

But—the fatal hour struck even for him.

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The wild-beast nature awoke even in Sganarelle. Shortly before I was brought to my uncle's house, the gentle fellow had suddenly committed several outrages, each worse than the preceding one.

The programme of his misdeeds was the same as with all the others. To begin with, he tore off a goose's wing; then he laid a paw on the back of a colt which was running after its mother, and broke its spine; lastly, something displeased him about an old blind beggar and his guide, so he rolled them over and over in the snow, and their hands and feet had been badly crushed in the process. They were both taken to the hospital and Therapont was ordered to conduct Sganarelle to the pit, out of which he would be taken only once—for execution.

Anna, while undressing us that night, myself and my little cousin, told us many touching details of Sganarelle's interment in the dungeon where he was to await his doom. Therapont had absolutely refused to put an

iron ring through his lip, or in any way to use force. He had just said: "Come along, bear," and the bear had risen and followed him. As a grotesque incident, rather pathetic too,—it was noticed that he had gravely put on the hat with the straw plumage and laid his arm round the man's shoulder,—and so they had walked all the way, companionably, like a pair of friends.

And friends, indeed, they were.

V

Therapont was very sorry for Sganarelle, but wholly powerless to help him. Bear in mind that, in the little realm where these events took place, no offence was ever forgiven and Sganarelle, having offended, was to pay the penalty of his aberrations and die a cruel death.

The baiting was to take place for the entertainment of the numerous guests who usually assembled at the mansion at Yule-

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tide, and the necessary orders were already issued when Therapont was commanded to take the delinquent to the "pit."

The incarceration of a condemned bear was a simple matter enough. The mouth of the pit was covered with slender, frail poles, over which was thrown light brushwood, and this again disappeared under a layer of soft snow, so that it was impossible to detect the treacherous trap. The docile, unsuspecting animal was led up to the spot and made to advance across it. After a step or two brushwood and poles broke under his weight, and he found himself at the bottom of the deep pit, to get out of which was absolutely impossible, and there he stayed up to the day appointed for his execution. Then a wooden beam, some thirty feet long, was lowered into the pit, when the bear quite naturally used it to climb up and out, on to the plain, where the baiting immediately began. If, as sometimes happened, a more than usually intelligent animal, warned by

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some instinct, refused to stir, he was prodded with long poles ending in sharp iron spikes, pelted with bunches of ignited straw, or shot at with blank cartridges out of guns and pistols. Therapont took Sganarelle to his prison in the prescribed manner, but returned home very sad and gloomy. As ill luck would have it, he told his sister how "kindly" the poor beast had gone along; how, after falling through the brushwood, he sat down at the bottom of the pit, folded his fore paws like hands, and moaned,—it sounded just as if he cried. . . . The boy told his sister that he ran from that pit as fast as his feet would carry him, so as not to hear those pitiful moans, which sheer broke his heart.

"Thank God," he added, "that it was not I who was ordered to fire at him if he escaped from the dogs. Had it been I, I should have taken any punishment, but not for worlds could I have fired at him."

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VI

Anna told us all about it, and we told the tutor Kolberg, who, in his turn, told my uncle, just to amuse him. The old gentleman listened, and all that he said was: "Fine fellow, Therapont," then clapped his hands thrice.

This was his signal for his own man, Justin, a little old Frenchman, who had been taken prisoner in 1812, then had stayed of his own will, as had so many others.

Justin instantly made his appearance in his neat, lavender swallow-tail coat with silver buttons, and my uncle gave him his last orders for the morrow which were that the men to be placed in the ambushes should be: Phlegont, a famous marksman, never known to miss, and—Therapont. He evidently expected to get some amusement out of the struggle of feelings in the poor lad's breast. If he refused to fire or purposely missed, he would, of course, suffer heavily,

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and Sganarelle would all the same be killed by the other man, who never missed. Justin bowed and marched off to transmit the order he had received. We children were dismayed at the mischief we had set afoot, and felt that there was in all this something dreadfully wrong and sad, so that God only knew what the end would be.

After this we had not the heart to take due interest either in the splendid combined dinner and supper which was served on Christmas Eve when the rising of the Evening Star put an end to the day's fast, or in the guests who arrived for the night, though among them were several children.[1]

[1] Christmas Eve, in the Orthodox Church, is a day of absolute fast. From midnight on no food should be taken in strict observance, not even a drink of water, until the appearance of the first star. At the time of which the author writes, fasts and other church ordinances were almost universally observed by the higher classes. That religious observances have gradually fallen into general disuse among the educated classes, is hardly a matter for unqualified satisfaction.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

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We were terribly sorry for Sganarelle, also for Therapont, and could not make up our minds for which of the two we felt the more sorry.

We both—my cousin and myself—were a long time tossing and turning in our cots; we both were late falling asleep, and when we did so, ours was a heavy, restless sleep and more than once we started with frightened cries out of dreams of the bear. And when nurse tried to quiet us, telling us we need no longer be afraid of him, since he was sitting in the pit and would be killed next day, this clumsy attempt at comforting only increased our agitation.

I even applied to her for enlightenment: whether we might not pray for Sganarelle? But such a question was beyond the old dear's theology; yawning and crossing her mouth,[1] she replied that she could not be

[1] Many among the lower classes even now still cross their mouths in the act of yawning, lest some stray evil spirit should slip in unawares.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

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sure about that for she had never spoken to the priest on the subject, but that a bear, after all, was one of God's creatures, the same as we; and besides, there had been bears with Noah in the Ark.

It seemed to me that the fact of bears having been among the passengers of the Ark pointed to the conclusion that God's infinite mercy might be extented not to men alone, but to His other creatures as well; so I, in the fulness of childhood's faith, knelt by my cot, and, burying my face in the pillow, implored the Majesty of God not to be offended at my ardent prayer and to take pity on Sganarelle.

VII

Christmas Day, we children were all dressed up in our Sunday best and, attended by tutors and governesses, came to the dining-room, to morning tea. Among the crowd of relatives and guests I noticed our parish clergy: the priest, the deacon, the sacristan, and the sexton.

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When my uncle entered the room, the clergy sang the Christmas anthem. Then tea was drunk, and, very soon after, a light luncheon was served, so as not to interfere with the early, two o'clock holiday dinner. Immediately after dinner the whole crowd was to drive out, to witness the baiting of Sganarelle. There was to be no delay, for days are short at this time of the year, and darkness would make the baiting impossible, as the bear could easily escape under its cover.

Everything proceeded as planned. We were taken away from the table to get dressed, as we were to go with the crowd. We wore coats lined with hare fur and high boots knitted of fleecy goat's wool, with warm felt soles, and were bundled into sleighs. And along both sides of the house, before the entrances, was arrayed a number of large sleighs, wide and low, draped with rich bright-coloured rugs, and drawn by handsome troikas. Two grooms held my uncle's

favourite mount, an English bay mare, named "Dandy."

My uncle came out in his fox-lined riding overcoat and tall pointed, fox-fur cap, and the moment he was in the saddle, held in place by turquoise-studded back- and breast-straps and covered with a black bearskin, the whole long procession started; in about fifteen minutes we were on the spot and deployed into a wide semicircle. All the sleighs were turned halfway towards the vast, even, snow-covered plain, enclosed in a cordon of mounted hunters and bounded in the distance by the wood, at the entrance of which, behind some bushes, were the cunningly contrived ambushes where Phlegont and Therapont lay concealed.

These ambushes were invisible, and only those who knew pointed to a couple of scarcely noticeable low ramparts constructed of snow, from which the men were to fire if the bear escaped. The pit in which poor Sganarelle was confined, was not observable either, so we

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turned our attention to the brilliant line of horsemen, carrying behind their backs a variety of handsome guns of different periods and make: Swedish, German, English, and Polish.

My uncle stood his horse at the head of the line. He was handed a locked leash of two of the most ferocious "leeches," and on the housing by his saddle bow in front of him was laid a white handkerchief.

The young dogs, for whose practice the offending Sganarelle was doomed to die, were in great numbers and all carried themselves most independently, manifesting great eagerness and lack of discipline. They yelped, whined, barked, jumped, and got themselves tangled up in the leashes around the horses, on which sat uniformed whippers-in, who kept up an unceasing cracking of their long whips, in order to reduce to some kind of subordination all these young creatures, wild with excitement and with the one longing to rush at the beast, whose near presence their sharp noses had long ago betrayed to them.

Now was the moment to get Sganarelle out of the pit and deliver him up to his tormentors, to be torn to pieces. . . .

My uncle waved the white handkerchief and shouted, "Go it!"

VIII

Out of the group of hunters who formed my uncle's own particular staff eight or ten stepped forth and walked across the plain.

Some two hundred paces away they began to lift from the snow a long—but not very stout—wooden beam, which, up to this moment, the distance had prevented our seeing. This was going on near the mouth of the pit, but that also we had been unable to make out from our remote position.

Having lifted the beam, they at once lowered one end of it into the pit, at such an angle that the animal could as easily walk up the incline as he might walk up a staircase. The other end was braced against the edge of the pit and stuck out a couple of feet.

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Every eye followed this preliminary operation which led up to the most interesting moment, when Sganarelle should, according to general expectation, make his appearance outside. . . . But he evidently mistrusted something, and would not come out.

They began to pelt him with snowballs and to worry him with spiked poles; there was a roar, but the clever beast would not stir. Then we heard a few shots directed straight into the pit; Sganarelle only growled angrily, but, stubbornly, did not show himself.

Then, from somewhere behind the line of horsemen, was driven, at a gallop, a common one-horse sleigh, such as peasants use to carry manure, now laden with dry rye straw.

The horse was a tall, lean old animal, one of those that serve on farms to carry forage from the stack-yard, but, in spite of its age and leanness, it fairly flew, raised tail bristling. It was doubtful, however, whether

this extraordinary energy was a remnant of youthful mettle, or the result of fright and despair, caused by the proximity of the bear. Rather, it would appear, the latter, for the horse was bridled, over and above the usual iron bit, with a strong cord which had already torn its age-grey lips bloody. It raced and tossed so desperately, from side to side, that the stable boy who drove it, while pulling its head up with the cord, with the other hand mercilessly plied the whip.

Well, anyhow, the straw was, with difficulty, divided into three bundles, which, after being set on fire, were thrown into the pit from three sides at once, leaving only one exit free—the side against which leaned the beam.

A furious, deafening roar issued from the pit, mingled with groans, but . . . the bear did not show up. . . . From man to man, a rumour reached us, that Sganarelle's fur was singed all over, but that he had covered his eyes with his paws and was cowering in a

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corner, breast and belly pressed hard against the ground, but could not be made to stir.

The farm-horse, its lips sawed raw and bloody, raced back again. Everybody thought it had gone for another load of straw. A reproving murmur broke out among the spectators: "Why did not the managers of the show provide enough straw in the first place, so as to have an abundance of it on hand?" My uncle was getting angry and was shouting something which I could not make out on account of the noise and general confusion, as well as the ever-increasing yelping and whining of the dogs and cracking of the long whips. Yet there was a certain sense and method in all this, and when the old horse, tossing and snorting, came racing back, it was seen that the sleigh was bringing, not another load of straw, but . . . Therapont!

The orders issued by my uncle, in his rage, were to the effect that the boy should be made to descend into the pit and *himself bring out his friend to be baited and killed!* . . .

IX

And so—Therapont was brought. He was evidently greatly agitated, but acted firmly and with decision and went to work without the least attempt at resistance to the master's commands. He took from the sleigh the rope with which the load of straw had been kept in place and tied one end of it around the beam which happened to be notched at the top. The rest of the rope he kept in his hands, and holding fast to it, began to walk down the beam, into the pit. . . .

The terrible roaring stopped and changed to a low growl. It was as though the bear were complaining to his friend of the cruel treatment to which he was being subjected; but in another moment the growl also subsided, and there was absolute silence.

"He is embracing and licking the boy!" exclaimed one of the men who had been standing around the pit.

Among the spectators, seated in the sleighs,

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some sighed, others frowned. Many were seized with pity, and evidently did not expect much pleasure from what was to follow. But these fleeting impressions were effaced by an event still more unexpected and more touchingly pathetic.

Suddenly, above the edge of the pit, as out of a trap, appeared Therapont's curly head in its round hunter's cap. He was crawling up in the same manner in which he had operated his descent, *i. e.*, he was walking up the beam, pulling himself up by the help of the rope, which was firmly fastened to the top end of it; but—*he was not alone:* along with him, one heavy, shaggy paw thrown across his shoulders, came Sganarelle! . . . The bear was out of sorts and certainly did not look his best. Worn out by suffering and deeply shaken, evidently not so much bodily as morally, he strikingly recalled King Lear. He shot sidelong glances from bloodshot, wrathful, and indignant eyes. Like Lear, he was all tousled and partly singed, and, in

places, wisps of straw stuck to his fur. To complete his likeness to the hapless monarch, Sganarelle, by a curious freak of chance, possessed a contrivance not unlike a crown. Whether out of affection for Therapont, or, perhaps, merely by chance, he was pressing under his armpit the hat with which his friend had supplied him and which he wore when he fell into the pit, victim to that friend's compulsory treachery. It appears he had treasured the friendly gift, and now, when his heart had found momentary relief in the loved one's embrace, the moment he touched the ground he produced the trophy, crumpled, as it was, out of all shape, and clapped it on the top of his head. This sally moved many to laughter, but others were painfully affected by the sight. Some even hastily turned away from the poor beast who, in the next few minutes, was to meet so dire a fate.

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X

While these things were going on, the dogs howled and worked themselves into an utterly ungovernable frenzy of delirious excitement. Even the long whip had lost its sobering effect on them. Puppies and older dogs, at the sight of Sganarelle, rose on their hind feet and, hoarsely howling and snorting, choked in their leather collars. At the same time Therapont was being driven back at a furious pace to the ambush at the entrance of the wood. Sganarelle, finding himself once more deserted, was impatiently tugging at one of his paws, which had accidentally got entangled in the rope thrown down by Therapont and fastened with its one end to the beam. He was in a hurry to disengage that paw, or else break the rope, in order to run after his friend, but, clever as he was, his, after all, was but a bear's intelligence, and, instead of disengaging his paw, he only tied it up the tighter.

Seeing that the matter was not going as he would have it, Sganarelle gave a desperate jerk, thinking to break the rope and have done with it, but it was a strong one and held out, the only result of his exertions being that the beam gave a jump and stood upright in the pit. He turned, and at the same instant two of the dogs, being slipped from the leash, reached him, and one of them, in the act of springing, drove its sharp fangs into the bear's shoulder.

He was so busy with the rope, that he did not expect this attack and at first seemed not so much angry as astonished at such impudence; but half a second later, when the dog momentarily let go, in order to take a deeper and firmer grip, he tore it from him with one paw and flung it to a great distance from him, its belly ripped wide open, so that the entrails instantly dropped out on the blood-stained snow. The other dog was crushed to death under one mighty hind foot. But the most terrible and unexpected thing was what hap-

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pened to the beam. With the same desperate effort with which he had flung away the dog, he wrenched the beam out of the pit by the rope which was firmly fastened to its upper end and it flew out bodily. The rope being stretched to the utmost, the beam swiftly twirled round the bear as round a pivot and, cutting into the snow with its other end, at one revolution caught and smashed, leaving them dead on the spot, not one or two or three of the rushing dogs, but quite a number of them. Some uttered one squeal and dug at the snow with their paws, but most of them just lay still where they were bowled over.

Either Sganarelle was too intelligent not to realize what a formidable weapon had fallen into his possession, or else the rope, wound around his paw, cut too deep, causing intolerable pain; anyhow he uttered a tremendous roar and laid violent hold of it with that same paw, the strain adding such impetus to the beam that it was lifted into a horizontal

line in continuation of the paw which held the rope, and began to hum, as might a gigantic top, started with extraordinary force. Anything coming in contact with it must inevitably have been shattered to splinters. And should the rope prove weaker at some point and suddenly break, the beam, violently freed, must have been hurled to a great distance by centrifugal force; indeed, there is no saying to what distance it might have flown and it must infallibly have destroyed any living thing it might have encountered in its flight.

All of us,—people, horses and dogs,—all along the line, were in the greatest danger, and everybody, of course, wished, in view of the preservation of his own life, that the rope, by which Sganarelle twirled his gigantic sling, might prove solid. Still, what would be the end of it all? The solution of this question, however, no one felt inclined to await, with the exception of a few hunters and the two marksmen ambushed at the

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entrance of the wood. All the rest of the crowd, meaning the guests and the members of my uncle's family and household, who had come to witness the "sport," found it anything but entertaining. To a man, gripped by panic, they ordered their coachmen to take them from the dangerous spot with all possible despatch, and the entire caravan started off homeward at break-neck speed and in the wildest confusion, each madly striving to get ahead of the others, with the result that there were several collisions, not a few falls, some laughter, and a good deal of fright. Those that fell out of the sleighs thought that the beam had broken loose and was flying, whistling, over their heads, while the infuriated bear was in full pursuit.

But the guests, on reaching the house, could collect their scattered senses and quiet down; not so the few who stayed on the scene of the tragedy; they were to witness something far more terrible than anything that had gone before.

XI

It was out of the question to set any more dogs at Sganarelle. For, armed as he was, he could have exterminated the whole lot of them without the least harm to himself. And the bear, twirling his beam and turning round and round along with it, was steadily making for the wood, where death lay in wait for him, ambushed with Therapont and Phlegont, the never missing.

A well-aimed ball would end everything promptly and surely.

But fate favoured Sganarelle to a marvellous degree; it was as though it had decided to save him at any cost.

At the very instant when he came abreast of the low ramparts from behind which gleamed the muzzles of the two rifles, pointed directly at him, the rope suddenly broke, and the beam, with the precipitousness of an arrow sped from the bow, was hurled one

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way, while the bear, losing his balance, tumbled over the other way.

Then, before the eyes of the few who had stayed, was enacted a thrilling, gruesome scene. The beam with one end knocked down the ramparts and the entire artificial arrangement of bushwork which served to conceal Phlegont, then, clearing him with a mighty bound, buried itself with its other end in a distant snowdrift. Sganarelle, meanwhile, wasted no time, After rolling over three or four times, he landed straight on Therapont's snow rampart. . . .

The bear knew him at once, breathed in his face with hot, wide-open mouth, and was just about to give him a lick, when a shot cracked from the opposite side, the bear fled into the wood . . . and Therapont dropped senseless to the ground.

They lifted him up and examined him. He was shot through the arm, but in the wound were a few hairs of the bear's fur.

Phlegont did not for that forfeit his reputa-

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tion as first-rate marksman, for he had fired in a hurry from a heavy rifle and without the protection of the rampart, which would have served to steady his aim. Besides, it was twilight, and beast and man were too closely huddled together. Under such conditions the shot could justly be called masterly of its kind.

All the same—Sganarelle was gone! The pursuit could not possibly be started that night, and before morning the mind of him, whose will was the one law of this little world, had undergone a change.

XII

My uncle had stayed to the end. He came home sterner and more wrathful even than usual. Before dismounting he issued orders that the bear should be tracked at daybreak and surrounded so as to make it impossible for him finally to escape. A well-conducted battue would, of course, give a very different result.

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The next thing looked for was an order concerning the wounded boy. It was the general opinion that something terrible awaited him. The least that he had been guilty of was neglecting his direct duty of planting his hunting knife into the bear's breast when he found himself at such close quarters with him, and letting him get away unharmed, actually out of his embrace. But, over and above this patent omission, there were strong and, it appeared, only too well-founded suspicions that, at the critical moment, he had, consciously and of malice prepense, refused to lift a hand against his furry friend and had allowed him to go free. The well-known attachment existing between the two lent more than probability to this supposition, which not only was current among those who had taken an active part in the proceedings, but was being discussed by all the guests as well.

Listening to the talk of the grown-ups who had assembled for the evening in the big hall

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where by this time a splendidly decorated Christmas-tree was being set up for our benefit, we "kids" shared both their suspicions and their apprehensions as to what might befall Therapont. Yet nothing happened just at first, and from the anteroom, through which my uncle had to pass on the way to his own rooms, the tidings reached us that no orders concerning the boy had as yet been issued.

"Is that a good sign or a bad one, I wonder?" whispered someone,—and the whisper was sorrowfully echoed by every heart in the midst of the general depression.

It had been heard by Father Alexis, the aged parish priest, wearing the bronze cross given to members of the clergy for patriotic service in the national war of 1812. The old man sighed and spoke, also in a whisper:

"Pray to the newborn Christ!"

With these words he crossed himself, and we all, as many as were present, grown-ups and children, masters and servants, as by

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common impulse, followed his example. Just in time. For we had scarcely resumed our natural attitudes when the door flew open and my uncle entered, leaning on a light cane and accompanied by his two favourite greyhounds and his man Justin, the latter carrying on a silver salver his white silk handkerchief and his round snuff-box, adorned with a portrait of the Emperor Paul.

XIII

My uncle's deep grandfather's arm-chair was placed for him on a small Persian rug in front of the tree, in the middle of the room. Silently he sat down in it and still silently took from Justin his handkerchief and snuff-box. Both dogs instantly lay down at his feet, resting their long muzzles on their forepaws.

My uncle wore a loose house jacket of dark blue silk with heavily embroidered frogs and rich filigree silver clasps, ornamented each with a large turquoise. In his hand he held

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the cane, a slender, but strong stick of natural Caucasian cherry wood. And just now he really needed it, for, during the recent turmoil his wonderfully trained mare "Dandy" had been unable to preserve her self-command: she had swerved to one side and crushed her rider's leg against a tree. The leg was very painful now and my uncle even limped slightly.

This additional mishap naturally did not improve his sore and angry state of mind. Another untoward circumstance was that we all stopped talking at his entrance,—a thing which, in common with all suspicious people, he greatly resented, and Father Alexis, who knew him well, hastened, as best he could, to mend matters by breaking the ominous silence.

He began to talk to us children, who had gathered in a little separate circle around him. He asked us: did we understand the meaning of the Christmas anthem? It turned out that not we alone, but our elders too, under-

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stood it but imperfectly. The priest then began to explain to us the words: "glorify," "uplifting,"—and, when he came to this last word, his own spirit and heart were gently uplifted. He spoke of the gift which the poorest might, "as of old," boldly bring to the manger of the "newborn Babe," a gift more worthy than the gold, the myrrh, and the frankincense of the ancient Kings. That gift is—our heart, reformed by His teaching. The old priest spoke of love, of forgiveness, of the duty of each to comfort friend and foe "in Christ's name." . . . And methinks that his speech at that hour was inspired. . . . We well knew what he was driving at; we all hearkened with special feeling, praying that his words should reach their goal, and tears, good tears, trembled on many an eyelash. . . .

Suddenly—the noise of a fall. Uncle's cane. . . . It was picked up and presented to him, but he did not touch it; he sat, slightly inclined to one side, his hand resting on the

arm of his chair, holding the large turquoise of one of the clasps, apparently forgotten. And now he dropped that too, and made no movement to recover it.

Every eye was turned on his face. An astounding thing was happening: he was weeping! . . .

The priest gently moved the children aside, approached my uncle and silently, with uplifted hand, made the sign of the cross over him in blessing.

My uncle raised his face, took the old priest's hand, and unexpectedly kissed it, with the one word, spoken low: "Thanks!"

At the same moment he glanced at Justin, and ordered him to fetch Therapont. The boy entered, pale, his arm in a sling.

"Stand here," commanded my uncle, pointing to the rug.

Therapont approached and dropped on his knees.

"Rise . . . rise," spoke my uncle. "I pardon thee."

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Therapont again threw himself at his feet. My uncle spoke in a nervous agitated voice.

"Thou hast loved a beast as not many know how to love a human being, and by that hast thou touched my heart and exceeded me in magnanimity. I hereby extend to thee a free gift: thy liberty and one hundred roubles to start with. Go thy way, whither thou wouldst!"

"I thank you, but go I will not!" cried Therapont.

"What?"

"I will not go," repeated the boy.

"What wouldst thou then?"

"In return for your gracious goodness I would serve you henceforth of my own free will, more faithfully than I ever served you from fear and on compulsion."

My uncle blinked and applied his white silk handkerchief to his eyes with one hand, while with his other arm, bending down, he embraced Therapont . . . and we all felt impelled to rise from our seats and close

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our eyes. . . . Sufficient for the moment was the consciousness that here, in this room, a wonder had been wrought to the glory of the Most High, filling it with the fragrance of peace in Christ's name, in place of harsh fear.

The spirit which had descended on the mansion extended its gracious influence over the village as well. Vats of home-brewed beer were sent there, joy-fires blazed; there was general merrymaking, and people jestingly said to one another:

"We have lived to see a wild beast go forth in the holy peace of Christmas, to proclaim the glory of Christ."

The pursuit of Sganarelle was countermanded. Therapont, a free man now, soon took Justin's place as my uncle's own body-servant and became not alone his faithful servant, but his devoted friend, and remained such to the day of his death. With his own hand he closed his master's eyes and saw him laid to rest in one of the Moscow ceme-

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teries, where his monument may be seen to this day. And there, at his master's feet, reposes Therapont himself.

There is no one now to take flowers to them, but in many a den in the slums of the city there still are those who remember the tall, white-haired old gentleman, who seemed, by some miraculous intuition, to divine where there was real trouble or sorrow and always got there in time himself, or else sent, never empty-handed, his kindly, goggle-eyed servant.

These two good men, of whom many stories might be told, were my uncle and his devoted Therapont, whom the old gentleman sometimes called in jest "the beast-tamer."

From an Old Chronicle

By N. S. Lesskof

I

THE RAID

THE origin of the village Plodomassofka is unknown to history. It was named after the boyars Plodomassof, who owned it from olden times. The manor house, which lorded it over the entire countryside, was their nest, their cradle, and their nursery.

The family is a very old one. Their names are met with in the rolls of state servants under Ivan the Third and Ivan the Terrible, and in the latter's reign two of the name ended their careers, one on the scaffold and the other on the pale.

Thus fallen into disgrace, this noble family, deserted and forgotten, thereafter, and until

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the reign of Peter the Great, lived on a grand scale in their own home nest of Plodomassofka. This was an important and ancient village, situated in the midst of a dense forest growth, on the banks, of the water-abounding, swift river Turitsa, a tributary of the Volga, in a fertile healthful locality, rich in waters, and woods, and meadows, and all the good things that delighted the eye of the Creator as He looked on His creation, and forced from Him a word in His own praise, for He saw that "it was good." Still, while living in the midst of all this beauty, the Plodomassofs did not multiply, and, at the time of the reign of the first Emperor,[1] their only representative was an orphaned youth, the boyar Nikita Yuritch, who, ever since he could remember, knew himself orphan of both parents and grew up in the charge of nurses and menial attendants, in all the fulness of lawless self-indulgence characteristic of

[1] Peter the Great was the first to assume the European title of "Emperor."

the age, which, however, was already being bridled by the strong hand of the imperial reformer. Nikita Yuritch Plodomassof was destined to witness the beginning of the cessation of the boyars' lawless doings and himself to be caught under one of the wheels, which, guided by the Tsar, were driving the obdurately stagnating life of old Russia into new channels. In the year 1715 there arrived at Plodomassofka, in a large, morroco-curtained covered cart (*kibitka*), certain government commissaries, who, accepting neither excuses nor gifts, took away with them, in that same *kibitka* the eighteen-year-old master, and carried him far away, to the presence of the Tsar himself, at his new capital, "Peter." The Tsar sent him, along with other noblemen, to foreign lands, where, however, young Nikita did not so much learn things as pine for home so that, when at last, in the year 1720, he returned to his native country, he took advantage of the many cares which left the Sovereign scant

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leisure, to buy his freedom of the rapacious dignitaries who surrounded him, and fled home, to his own Plodomassofka.

Here he acted as do, in our time, the young Turks returned home from some Paris college: proceeded to make up for the manifold restraints and the uncongenial mode of life to which, for the last five years, he had been subjected by civilization. He settled down as feudal lord in his ancient house, squat and broad, like an ill-baked loaf, restored the old order of things, as it had been under his father and grandfather, with falconry and venery in full blast; falconers, huntsmen, whippers-in, and grooms were recruited from the host of serfs and formed into a veritable brigand band, unamenable to shame, to conscience, to any kind of restraint, knowing no law but the whim of their lord and master.

With this gang the newly returned "civilized" boyar performed unbelievable feats: forays into neighbouring fields with trampling

of crops,—levying tribute on merchants travelling through his domains,—plundering trains of waggons on their way to fairs,—abducting and ravishing damsels,—these were but innocent pastimes, to keep him amused. His cold instincts took him to far more gruesome lengths. He rode around with his huntsmen like a veritable brigand chieftain, seizing barns and whole villages just for the fun of it, raiding and ransacking small, defenceless towns,—captured district police captains, shaved priests and clerics. But an end was put at last to these outrages, and that in the most unlooked for manner.

In the autumn of the year 1748, on one of his wild expeditions, Nikita and his horde accidentally turned in at the village of Zakromà, a very long way from home. This was not even really a village, but merely a hamlet of some twenty hearthstones. It was no less than two hundred versts distant from Plodomassofka, and for that reason had, so far, escaped the attention of the

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terrible squire and had been safe from his attacks. The village belonged to Andreï Baïtsourof, a retired old soldier, who in his boyhood had been one of the young Tsar Peter's boy soldiers, his comrades and playmates, whom he drilled in play and who later in earnest became his trusty supporters and brothers in arms, the nucleus of the two famous regiments, the Semionoftsi and Preobrajentsi.

Here, in this humble home, Nikita Plodomassof saw the owner's fifteen-year-old daughter Marfa (Martha) Andreevna, and, though himself fifty-one years of age, became passionately enamoured of the child at first sight and informed her parents of the fact on the second day of his visit.

That his suit might be rejected, or even be received with the slightest hesitation, by these poor gentlefolks, was a possibility which never occurred to him. It were unjust to say that, in his opinion, he was doing a great honour to such insignificant people

as the Baïtsourofs; he simply did not think at all of how his wishes might strike them. He knew only one thing: his desires must be fulfilled,—and so he did not mince matters about expressing them.

"I am sick at last of this bachelor existence and these low women," he informed the old people. "So I intend henceforth to live cleanly with your daughter, who, both in looks and disposition, pleases me greatly. Of your goodness vouchsafe her to me."

This was said at supper, at which meal the young maiden was not present. If the offer was unceremonious, no less unceremonious was the answer: the mother flatly refused. He was so astonished that he at first forgot to be angry and only asked:

"Your reason, pray?"

"In the first place, worshipful sir, thou art no match for us little folk; in the second place, thou art, I take it, a year or two older than my husband, her father,—and, in the third, I tell thee plainly, I am not minded to

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let my daughter take the place of those wantons of thine, nor do I hold such love as thine in any way creditable to an honourable maiden. Craving thy pardon, our valued guest, and meaning no disrespect, never shall daughter of our blood be wife of thine," concluded the old lady, rising from the table and bowing low.

This was more than Plodomassof could stand: "Enough!" he shouted, "enough!" and ten minutes later his host's young daughter, swathed like an infant in hunting cloaks and furs, was being tied up in a bundle with saddle-straps on the porch of her own father's house and in ten minutes more, was placed in the centre of Plodomassof's gang, headed by himself, and was whirled away at full speed to parts unfamiliar, unknown, and, in any case, fearsome.

II

THE PURSUIT

Next morning the Baïtsourofs and all the members of their household were found by

some of their peasants securely bound with cords and dog-leashes and in the most pitiful condition generally.

Each of the hapless couples received this catastrophic blow in a different spirit. Old Baïtsourof's sense of intolerable wrong, his scalding tears and heart-rending sorrow for his dearly loved daughter, now, in her tender years, struggling like a stricken dove in the impure talons of the voracious raven,—all this cried for vengeance. But he, poverty stricken gentleman that he was, had no lightning-shod steeds at his command, nor riders, able to breast the onslaught of Plodomassof's horde, nor yet shining partisans and arquebuses, such as dangled at each man's back,—and, lastly, the robbers had fourteen hours' start —enough for Plodomassof's horses to take the helpless couple's treasure, their gentle, clever child, more than half way to his lair. True, the crowd of their poorly fed and poorly equipped people, attracted by the disaster, were all on hand, filling the house;

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nor were the wretched, jaded, undersized horses far to seek,—no farther than the surrounding courts and backyards—so that nothing hindered Baïtsourof from collecting his cavalry, and flying to his stolen child's rescue. That, indeed, had been the old man's first thought while eager hands were loosening the knots of the cords that bound him, but of what use were his little ploughing horses in pursuit of Plodomassof's high-bred hunters, which even now were bearing away his daughter with lightning speed? Of what use were his humble, peaceable tillers of the soil in an armed encounter with Plodomassof's boisterous henchmen, who would defend their master's latest fancy,—her, his own baby girl, who would have become the robber's minion ere her father could ride half the distance separating his hamlet from the thief's impure den? What the father suffered can easily be imagined. He saw his defenceless child amidst surroundings which made his blood freeze;

travelling, pinioned as she was, on a horse's croup,—stretching out her feeble hands to him, her father, in whom her infant mind ever saw the ideal of all justice and might. He heard her wailing, her moans taken up and rent to fragments by the stormy autumn wind; saw her thrown on an infamous couch, and by the side of her pale tear-stained child's face he seemed to see glowering before his eyes Plodomassof's inflamed countenance under bushy grey brows. Borne down by these horrible imaginings, still more embittered by the exasperating consciousness of his powerlessness either to defend his child or to avenge her, the veteran sank down on the floor, and, lying prone with his face to the boards, tracked all over by the peasants' broad muddy soles, watered them with abundant tears. Infinitely more heroism, strength of mind, and ready wit did his wife manifest on this terrible occasion. Burying deep within her her measureless maternal woe, without wasting one minute,

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she ordered the horses put to the *kibitka*, invested her husband in his long disused regimentals, carefully packed away in the storeroom, got him into the vehicle, and sent him off to the city, where resided the highest authorities of the province, to enter his complaint and demand justice. But even while sending her husband on this errand, she evidently did not build very greatly on these authorities' interest and protection, for which distrust she surely had excellent reasons. In spite of the reigning severity, unbounded arbitrariness and neglect of justice were rife in the remoter parts of the country, which escaped his never-slumbering vigilance. Old lady Baïtsourof knew this; so, while she sent her husband to the city, she herself took other measures. The *kibitka* had hardly disappeared beyond the inclosure, when another and smaller two-horse vehicle stood before the porch of the modest house, and the mistress herself took her place in it, together with her daughter's

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portly nurse, Bassa, a captive Turkish woman.

The small *kibitka* in which the two women started on their journey, on leaving the inclosure, took an opposite direction to that in which the larger vehicle had disappeared, and, swinging along the ruts of the stocky autumn mud, made directly for Plodomassofka.

III

ON THE TRACK

Owing to the sloppy condition of the autumn roads, the vehicles in which the young captive's father and mother went their several ways travelled with exceeding slowness, sinking to the hub in mire. Old Baïtsourof could not reach the city in less than three days, and it would take his wife with her companion, the Turkish nurse, quite as long to get to Plodomassofka.

Here, meanwhile, towards evening of the very day on which the avenging mission left

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Zakromà, two idle Plodomassof menials, the major-domo and the butler, watching from one of the manor towers, saw approaching over the ridge, and across the blackened field, their master's mounted bodyguard.

But their experienced and observant eyes at once perceived something peculiar in the disposition of the advancing squad. The boyar's own beautiful dun courser, instead of leading, as usual, had given up his rightful position to the commoner steeds, and held the rear. Only his lean, nobly shaped head with the shining silver frontlet could be made out from the tower. The bright silver star, which held together the breast-straps, keeping the saddle in place, and which usually could be seen glistening from a great distance, now was hidden from view by the crowd in front of it. Neither could the embossed silver clasps be seen on the boyar's crimson tunic, trimmed with black sable, because he was bending low and lay flat on his horse's neck, looking down on something which was car-

ried carefully before him by his faithful servants.

Four horsemen rode ahead of the group, two in front and two behind. They rode at such a distance from each other, that two riding abreast could easily join hands, and the heads of the two horses at the back almost lay on the croups of the two in front.

These four horsemen carefully carried between them something which, at the distance, could not be made out by the assembled household, who stood ready to receive their returning lord and master.

As the squad approached nearer and nearer, the watchers recognized the features of the four riders carrying that strange burden; and now at last they caught sight of the dread, frowning countenance of the master himself. With head bent low, he gazed gloomily, from under brows pressed down by the heavy fur-bordered velvet cap, on that same carefully guarded object. What might it be? A wounded aurochs, or elk, or a litter

of gentle wild goats which the clever huntsmen had succeeded in taking out alive and the boyar, moved by whim, ordered taken home? But, why, in that case, should the squad move in such absolute silence, so unlike the usual boisterous gaiety marking the home coming from a successful expedition? Why no songs, no tabors? Why did not the eager hounds leap in their leashes? Why did not picked skirmishes caracol and race around the squad? And why did not the whipper-in Shebai gallop ahead, to instruct the butler as to what eatables and drinks should be set out to await the master's coming, and which two odalisks should be sent in from the women's quarters to hold the tassels of their lord's damask counterpane? Never yet had such disregard of all established rules been seen. The butler with the horde of menials and the crowd of submissive bondswomen indifferent in their feelings toward the common master and now stolidly waiting to know whose particular charms would take

his fancy for the time being,—all were puzzled at the quiet manner of his return. Their astonishment knew no bounds, and it seemed there would be no end to it, for the nearer the boyar and his troop approached, the better their strange actions could be made out, the more confused were the watchers' ideas, the higher and higher mounted the wave of their colossal amazement.

IV

MAID AT SUNSET

But soon it became apparent that the four horsemen who rode in front of the rest were supporting, suspended on the hooks attached to the saddle-trees, the corners of a large, many-coloured Persian carpet,—the same which was used to cover the boyar's roomy tent in camp, when out on hunting expeditions. Now on this carpet, suspended, cradle-wise, between four saddles, rested something small, snugly ensconced in a nest of white

down-pillows, closely wrapped in the boyar's own bright-coloured silk hunting-coat.

The bright wraps which sheltered the problematic, tiny figure were drenched with the rain which had been falling all day long and allowed the lookers-on to determine that it was not a wounded warrior who lay there, but a child, a girl scarcely fifteen years old.

And so, when the hunting caravan rode up to the house, all could see what it was they had captured and brought home.

The captive's youthful head, with its mass of black locks now wet through, was uncovered and sunk in a pillow as wet as itself; the lips were half open, the teeth tightly set, the eyes closed. She appeared to be asleep, but, in reality, was plunged in a deep swoon. In such pitiful condition was the Zakroma boyar's daughter, Martha Andreevna Baïtsourof, brought to Plodomassofka by her ravishers.

Struck down senseless at the moment when she was so unexpectedly torn from her home,

she had not recovered consciousness while the raiders galloped along, their horses' iron shoes digging up the black mire of the trackless fields, nor yet during the brief rest given them after a forty versts' run, and in this state, the semblance of death, she reached the ravisher's eyrie. It was fate itself that brought her to this house. This was clear to all when the murky, sullen autumnal sky itself cleared and smiled a welcome on the fair stranger. Scarcely had the horses which carried her stopped before the porch, their limbs trembling with excess of weariness, when, breaking through a rift in the muddy-grey clouds, a bunch of golden sunbeams shot down on the maiden, as though blessing her arrival, and instantly withdrew again.

This was taken as an omen, and much that was wonderful and supernatural was deducted from the phenomenon. The morning sky smiled on the house of debauch and orgies, and the unconscious captive entered it as one of those sleeping princesses, who, in

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the popular belief, are always so spotlessly pure and incomparably beautiful. On the same carpet on which she had travelled they now bore her in solemn silence into the house, laid her down on a clean couch, which was pushed into the middle of a well-lighted, spacious room and instantly surrounded by a crowd of handmaidens and waiting-women, who were under strict orders to watch for the sleeping beauty's awakening and to forestall her every wish.

The women assembled around the sleeping maiden's virgin couch experienced something akin to that which, according to apocryphal legends, befell heathen idols at the rising of the star, harbinger of Christ's nativity. All these young bondswomen felt that their reign was ended, but in their hearts there was neither envy nor ill-will towards the newcomer. They simply felt that one had come, greater than they, with whom they could not think of either wrestling or competing. They stood in silent expectation of the

hour when they should be removed from that malodorous temple, which awaited the purifying fumes of incense.

Plodomassof himself did not tarry in the room one minute after seeing the maiden cared for. On leaving it, he did not indulge in the orgies of which his home-coming usually gave the signal. He sat alone in his bedroom, impatiently waiting for the "wise woman," after whom he had dispatched his swiftest messengers to a distant village. This conjurer was expected, by her spells, to bring the captive out of her death-like torpor. But the conjurer's services were not required after all. Before she could make her appearance at the manor in response to the boyar's behest, the waiting-women and the old "nurses," newly deputed to attend the damsel, perceived the first slight signs betokening the cessation of that long death-like sleep.

Towards midnight, word was sent to the gloomy master that a rosy flush had spread

over the maiden's cheeks and brow, while her breast glowed with the soft whiteness of snowy down, and the warm life-blood was stealing from vein to vein. Plodomassof rose, flung a handful of silver on the floor for the messenger to pick up, and ordered her to see that they guarded the child with unabating watchfulness, as they would the apple of their eye.

Before dawn, there was a second and third message: the young captive had opened her star-bright eyes, and, waking out of her heavy slumber, had asked where she was, what sort of people, and inquired about her father and mother. Whereupon Plodomassof sprang to his feet and gave order that no questions should be answered, yet did not himself hie him to the fair one's chamber.

A mysterious, never-experienced dread kept him from sacrilegiously approaching the virgin, bred and nurtured amid conditions so widely differing from those prevailing under his roof, amidst his retinue of bonds-

men and bondswomen. He was afraid that the very sight of him might kill her, should he appear before her and he therefore delayed the decisive moment. He did not go to welcome his awakened captive, and the while the handmaidens and "nurses" deputed for her service were admiring the virgin charms of the Baïtsourofs' young daughter and observing the warm life-blood, "stealing from vein to vein" under the delicate skin, their master sat alone all day long, a prey to moral torments never known before. From his captive he desired something entirely different from what he used ruthlessly to take from his unfree odalisks. He saw in her the promise of a new, hitherto unknown happiness, and was afraid of destroying that happiness; he dreaded her resistance, feared his own anger, which, once aroused, would not spare even her. No; he would not spare her, he would then pour out all his wrath upon her and throw her, as prey to the least of his grooms. . . . And then . . .

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Then . . . Then he would flog the wretch to death . . . But that would not restore her.

No. He wanted to see his own reflection in her star-bright eyes, dewy with tears. He must manage so that those eyes should of their own accord turn to him. Trust to time? To kindness? To patience? And what if there should be pursuit? Oh, pursuit. . . . Should there be pursuit, then . . . Then he knew what he would do. Then . . . he would spare no one,—not her, not himself; but she should not be taken out of his house such as she had been carried into it.

God knows how long would have lasted Plodomassof's hesitations and what would have been the final result of them, had not something unexpectedly happened, which hastened the solution and caused him to act, not indeed in accordance with his accepted custom, but quite differently from what he had intended.

V

CURBING A WILD STEED WITH A STRAW BIT

At twilight of the same day, before old man Baïtsourof could have driven half the distance from his home to the city, or his wife, accompanied by the Turkish nurse, could have completed half her journey, a police commissary arrived on Plodomassof's territory.

This commissary was, to a certain extent, an habitual visitor at the boyar's house: he had at one time been induced to marry one of the master's best-liked favourites, whom Plodomassof wished to provide for honourably by this brilliant match and whom, from time to time, when he happened to be in the city, he still visited on the same terms as before, taking no account of her status as a married woman. Whenever the husband came to Plodomassofka, he served the master as buffoon and laughing-stock: standing on his head he would drink large bumpers of wine

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and mead; turn wheel somersaults, crack nuts with the back of his head, and dance a jig on the table before the assembled servants.

In view of these peculiar conditions the commissary was considered one of the Plodomassof's own men nor did the latter neglect his protégé's interests; he saw to it that his corncribs were well filled with grain, his storerooms with garden stuff, that his barnyard was well stocked with domestic fowls; he stood godfather to his own children and occasionally permitted his henchman to present himself in person before him to receive his bounty.

Well aware of the relations existing between Plodomassof and his humble follower, the menials did not hesitate to announce the latter and, taking the low growl which escaped the master for assent, they admitted the unexpected visitor to his august presence.

"What wouldst?" inquired Plodomassof, casting a wrathful glance at him.

Bending, bowing and stretching like a snake pinned down with a forked stick, the commissary was crawling towards the boyar, not daring to raise his voice or lift to him his swollen eyes.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Plodomassof, less roughly, looking with some astonishment at the man's ridiculous contortions. But he continued to crawl, and still gave no answer.

However habituated Plodomassof was to servile cringing, this continuous cowardly crawl struck him disagreeably; besides he instinctively felt that no man would so persistently keep silence, unless he were afraid to open his lips. It suddenly occurred to him that the fellow thus cringing before him sought him as somebody's envoy and brought news; his bushy brownish-grey brows contracted, like two angry bears ready to close.

"Speak, hound!" he thundered.

The commissary, instead of answering,

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prostrated himself flat at the boyar's feet and, with his face to the floor, raised a hand, which held a folded sheet of paper.

Plodomassof, always a hater of papers, was on this day less than ever in the mood to deal with one. He had had much to vex him, and, moreover, the various thoughts and feelings, which the day had brought, made it in truth unlike any other day within his memory. Was this the time forcibly to tear him from his cogitations in order to attend to a beggarly paper? But the paper kept poking at him with importunate insistence. In spite of his pushing it from him, now with his hand, now with his soft, bright-patterned morocco boot, it rose again and again quaking but obdurate. Plodomassof, seeing that he could not get rid of it, at length wrenched it out of that servile hand, impatiently unfolded it, read,—and sat as turned to stone.

This paper, in his eyes, exceeded in impertinence all that the world ever saw. It said that it had come to the knowledge of

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the Empress herself, that the boyar Nikita Yuritch Plodomassof, residing on his ancestral estate of Plodomassofka, habitually indulged in such outrageously licentious malpractices that, by her, the Empress's, sovereign command, the Governor of the province was enjoined to institute a strict investigation, and, should the rumours which had reached the Empress be confirmed, to have the said Plodomassof arrested without the least delay and sent out of his estate, forbidding him for all time there to reside.

As a preliminary to the fulfilment of this stern decree, notwithstanding Elizabeth's autocratic power, the decree itself, as we see, was dutifully submitted to the defendant for his information and gracious examination.

Having read it, Plodomassof leapt to his feet, like an angered beast. Instead of feeling alarmed and submitting to the sovereign's will, as the still prostrate commissary undoubtedly expected, he arose in the fulness of his insensate arrogance and, giving utter-

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ance to a thousand lowest curses, whistled for his people and ordered them to assemble before him in full force and in readiness. . . . Readiness for what? That he scarcely knew himself nor did he care; but, at the moment, he was ready, literally, for all and anything that was violent, reckless, anything that would show his contempt of the decree calling him to order and obedience. He now thirsted for but one thing: resistance, the most daring, the most insolent.

As for the boyar's gang of desperadoes, who enjoyed the wild life, and who in any case had not been trained to think for themselves, they cared no whit what it was they were to be ready for. It did not matter to them whether they should go freebooting, whom they should rob, insult, and oppress. From their youngest days, they had been weaned from all that is good and holy, and had made it a part of their established code to renounce a father and mother. They could look on with indifference at the desecration of a father's

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white hair, at a mother's tears, at a sister's dishonour. Whether or no they loved their lawless master, was a matter of no importance; what they did love was the lawless life, the key to which lay in absolute subserviency to the lawless will of Plodomassof. Bred in such a school, in a village remote not only from the capital, but from any centre of law, their only notions of the nature of lawful authority derived from such representatives of the same as their friend, the somersault-turning commissary, they, quite naturally, could feel no respect for it.

It was this same commissary, still kneeling before the boyar, who gave his thoughts a definite direction, showed him a definite goal.

"O, my father!" he piteously exclaimed after hearing the boyar's wrathful order, "do not issue such commands! Do not order the horses saddled and bridled; order the men instead to keep quiet in the stables, sitting still and plaiting bast shoes: a defiant attitude will only call forth greater severity."

Plodomassof, infuriated at these words, snatched from the table the imperial decree and tore it to little bits, which he threw on the floor, then set his foot on them.

"That's where I put her decrees!" he cried. "She herself is illegimate."

The commissary dropped down on his elbows, and in his terror writhed himself into the shape of a hook, as though seized by an insufferable convulsion.

"For pity's sake! I hear not! I hear nothing!" howled the kneeling representative of the law, now stopping his ears, now imploringly stretching out his hands and taking hold of the skirt of the raging boyar's hunting-coat. "Hear me, gracious lord,—I have not as yet told all I know. There is still another storm brewing. I met Baïtsourof, going to the city, to lodge a complaint against thee for forcible abduction of his daughter. Let her go! Even if all is not with her as it should be, send her away. Serfs cannot testify against their masters; so get her

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quickly out of the house, if not this minute, then tomorrow morning; if not, look out for trouble."

That was too much. What! That contemptible nullity, Baïtsourof, after rejecting the honour done him by Plodomassof's seeking his daughter in marriage, to go and lodge a complaint? Did they think to make trouble for him, Plodomassof? No, by heaven. That was more than could be borne!

"He would not have her my wife; very well, I shall promote her to a different rank. In what, forsooth, is she better than all my wenches that I should treat her so daintily? Since even this pettifogging soul makes no doubt that she having dwelt a day in my house, all is not with her as it should be, shall I then let her off scot free? And give people the right to laugh at me?"

In Plodomassof's soul there was a complete revulsion from those tender feelings towards the youthful captive, which had filled it so

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short a while ago: gone, they were gone and had left no trace!

"She shall be treated as all the rebellious ones have been treated heretofore," was his final resolve. "She shall be mine, nor will I leave unrewarded my trusty servants: there will be left enough for Vasska, Tarasska and all the rest of them.

"Follow me, and see what I will do to her for those words of thine!" roared the boyar at the unfortunate man, and jerking him to his feet, dragged him, with hardly any breath left in his body, to the upper story, where the young captive, fair and white as a freshly plucked apple, lay in the middle of the wide bed in the same chamber to which she had been brought, and wept, surrounded by the old nurses and young handmaidens and waiting-women, all of whom were deeply moved by her grief.

The boyar came stalking on like a heavy thundercloud driven by a furious hurricane. When he reached his prisoner's chamber, he

did not touch the brass knob with his hand nor call for the door to be opened from the inside, but with one kick tore it from its hinges and stood before the astonished eyes of the maiden and her attendants.

VI

BY MIDNIGHT WEDDED WIFE

When Plodomassof thus suddenly appeared in the door of his prisoner's chamber, the short autumn day had given place to impenetrable darkness. A fine drizzling rain was falling and a moderate but insistent wind was soughing and rustling behind the windows, which looked into the garden.

The girl, as said above, sat in the bed and wept, and all the women wept with her. Her sorrow was reflected in all their faces, and just at that moment no one expected Plodomassof, she least of all. Pining for her father and mother, whom she tenderly loved, she had had no time to consider her

own fate, her own position. He was very far from her thoughts, and the sight of him paralyzed her. She did not even pull up the silken quilt, to cover her bare shoulders' snowy whiteness from the boyar's blazing eyes.

"Well, my lady dear, how didst rest, how sleep, what didst dream?" he inquired, seating himself opposite to the bed in a massive armchair, behind which the commissary promptly retreated out of sight.

"I did sleep sweetly under thy roof, boyar, and for that sleep I give thee thanks. Also I dreamt of my father and mother, and I hope thou wilt not detain me here against my will, but wilt send me back to them."

Thus boldly spoke the maiden.

"Well, hardly, pretty bird. Better cast that hope from thee. Not for that wast thou taken, that thou shouldst return under thy father's roof."

The maiden looked straight in his face out of her child's eyes and asked:

"For what, then, boyar, was I taken?"

"For what . . . ?"

Plodomassof was troubled by this naïve question. He was about to return some cruelly crude and cynical answer, but a look at that sweet child's face made him ashamed of the intention.

At this moment she gently slipped from the bed and, swiftly crossing barefoot the space which separated it from the armchair, she sank down in tears at Plodomassof's feet and entreated him 'midst sobs:

"O, boyar, have pity on me! For the merciless hell is waiting! Let me return to my father and mother,—and I will enter a convent and pray for thee."

Plodomassof was positively at a loss how to begin in fulfilment of his threats. He turned and twisted in his seat and breathed hard, looking at the child's tearful eyes, and did not withdraw his big, red hands, which she, in her despair, was pressing tightly in her tiny ones.

"Why," he began after a while,—"I had intended to take thee to wife. . . ."

"No, no," she cried, springing to her feet and swiftly retreating towards the bed.—"No, I will not be thy wife. Send me home to my father."

"Stop!" angrily shouted Plodomassof.

"Good people, speak for me!" desperately cried the girl, rushing into the pitying crowd of nurses, handmaids, and waiting-women, who, so short a time before, had shed tears with her and showed her so much unfeigned sympathy.

But now she did not know those faces again, such was the change which had come over them with the boyar's mere presence. The crowd of nurses and waiting-women, opened the moment she sprang into their midst and again closed in a heap behind her, leaving her alone, face to face with Nikita Plodomassof.

Finding herself given up defenceless to the enemy, she turned round, swept the crowd

with a glance and on the instant was transformed.

"Woman, hand me my jacket!" she commanded in firm, imperious tones, becoming aware of the unseemly condition of her apparel.

A score of willing hands hastened to do her bidding.

Plodomassof did not interfere.

Marfa Andreevna now stood before him fully dressed, in the very costume in which she had charmed him in her home. The tears which but now flowed so copiously, were dried up, and there was in her now dry and tearless eyes that expression of calm defiance, which is so galling to bullies and tyrants, at once troubling and incensing them.

"And knowest thou, thou clever one, what I shall do to thee?" shouted Plodomassof.

"Whatever it is thou hast in mind, I am in thy hands to do with at thy pleasure. But wife of thine I will not be!"

"What?" roared Plodomassof, purple with rage.

"I am not frightened at thy wrath," she retorted. "The angrier and fiercer thou, the gladder I: to have me killed were best of all."

"So be it! Neither wife, nor noble damsel shalt thou be, but even such as these," cried Plodomassof, pointing to the crowd of shrinking women, and clapped his hands.

At this signal, as at the wave of a magic wand, the old butler stood before the master, and, rolling affrighted eyes, repeatedly uttered the one, seemingly incongruous, word: "Dragoons!"

"Dragoons? What dragoons? Where?"

"Here, boyar," replied the old man, "here," pointing to the door, which at this moment opened wide, and into the room, his trappings rattling, with heavy tread, strode a dragoon, in ponderous brass helmet, such as had never been seen in those parts, a long black horsetail waving from its crest.

The soldier was sent by the governor as bearer of a stern decree, to the effect that the boyar should do no hurt or harm to the noble damsel Baïtsourof by him abducted, should guard her more carefully than his own eyes, and, above all, should not dare harbour the very thought of wedding her.

This injunction was not only written in the paper which the dragoon placed in Plodomassof's hands, but repeated to him orally by the soldier, in the hearing of the assembled menials and the commissary before whom he had shown such insolent contempt of the first decree indited in the sovereign's name, and lastly of the damsel herself, who had suddenly found so powerful a defender.

Plodomassof glanced at the calm face of the girl who was the cause of all this conflagration, and he had a queer feeling that the whole thing was in reality just a farce, not worth the struggle, which somehow suddenly seemed to him to contain elements of fatal import.

Plodomassof once more glanced at the girl and, at the moment, did not even think her pretty. Just a white-faced little slip of a girl, not to be compared to those full-bosomed beauties, whose absolute lord and master he was. Was the whole affair worth a hundredth part of the trouble it was causing him? Trash to be swept away and dumped somewhere outside the yard. And the house would overflow with plenty just the same, and the master's plea sure would be attended to as theretofore. But there were that dolt of a dragoon, that scrivener of a commissary, and all that menial rabble, in whose presence he was being disciplined while it was essential that no one should suspect that he, Plodomassof, could be curbed: that was what he could not and would not endure. A bully's essentially servile soul cannot stand the derision of the low-born. It matters not to him whether that derision opens the lips in a scoffing smile, or closes them in servile silence; not alone in that smile or in that silence,—

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no, in the very groans into which he has the power to convert those smiles or that silence, —in everything he feels the derision of his powerlessness before this dragoon, before somebody's threats, somebody's higher authority, which henceforth is to assume supreme command over minds hitherto entirely subject to his exclusive rule.

All these considerations Plodomassof crowded into one instant; the next instant he made up his mind that such a transfer of authority must on no account be tolerated, and that with this object in view he must perform a deed which should exceed in lawless daring any he had ever yet perpetrated, and still in the next he rose, clapped his hands, and, when servants came rushing in, with a silent gesture, indicated the dragoon.

The soldier, who had been watching him, understood the gesture, and, whisking his broad sword from the scabbard, sprang into a corner of the room; but the boyar's gesture had been still more swiftly inter-

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preted by his men, and, before the dragoon had time even once to swing his weapon, he was lying on the floor overpowered by a score of iron hands, which held fast his every joint and limb. The warlike horsetail, which, but a moment ago, so threateningly challenged universal attention, now had lost all its prestige.

"A rope!" commanded the boyar, turning to one of his henchmen.

"The priest and his clerics," he ordered another.

"Tie a noose, pass the rope through that hook in the ceiling," he commanded the man who had brought a new hemp rope.

This was done, and the rope passed through the hook on which were gathered the folds of the bed canopy.

At this moment, shoved in from behind over the threshold, tottering and stumbling, the priest, deacon, and cleric entered the room.

"Stand before the ikon!" was the next command, addressed to the priest.

"O, lord, have pity!" entreated the latter, trembling and in tears.

The boyar whistled.

Two serving men seized on the quaking priest, thrust him into the vestment, which had been brought along with him, while a third, before his eyes, began to smear the noose with soap.

"Begin!" shouted the boyar at the half-fainting priest, when he had been placed in front of the ikon by the men who had arrayed him.

"What dost demand of me?" stammered the priest, half demented with fright.

"Marriage service," answered Plodomassof.

All stood stupefied.

"Begin!" again bellowed the enraged boyar.

"For whom?" scarce audibly uttered the priest, glancing sideways at the soaped noose.

"For me and her," replied Plodomassof, snatching at Marfa Andreevna's hand, and

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jerking her to his side, took his place with her behind the priest.

The latter then, the deacon, and the cleric, all shedding tears, began to intone the marriage service for the weeping damsel, whom the weeping women held in her place, having tied her delicate elbows together behind her back and a handkerchief across her mouth. But the boyar himself, to everybody's astonishment, prayed sincerely, decorously, and with deep feeling.

"And now," he said to the priest when the service was ended, "I will, in pity for thee, provide for thy safety. Give me the parish register. This dragoon here and this governor's envoy (pointing to the commissary), they are strangers here, and they shall testify over their signature that the damsel wedded me of her free will and with joy. However, the soldier is, I take it, illiterate; but the governor's envoy is cunning at all clerkly tricks; so give it to him, and he shall sign for both," went on Plodomassof. "And, that

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he may do so with the better grace cast the soaped noose over his head and let it stay there until he has written the last letter of the last word," concluded the boyar, noting signs of indecision in the trembling official.

The boyar's bidding was instantly done, and a swan's quill was placed in the poor man's hand, wherewith he wrote in the parish register all that it pleased Plodomassof to dictate.

"Good," approved the latter when all was done, and ordered the commissary to add at the bottom of the paper brought by the dragoon the following words: "Man and wife no earthly power may put asunder."

Hardly had this addition been made, when Plodomassof snatched the paper from under the commissary's hand and thrust in the dragoon's face the very decree which ordered him "above all, not to dare harbour even the thought of wedding the boyar's daughter, Marfa Andreevna Baïtsourof."

After Plodomassof had disposed of the

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state authorities and their envoys, it remained to conquer his young wife's will. This proved rather more difficult. Bound and gagged, it had been possible to make her stand through the marriage service. But she had hardly been released, when, with a squirrel's agility, she sprang on the window-sill and exclaimed:

"One step this way, and I shall be on the ground outside! Disobey,—and let the priest at once say the prayers for the dying."

Master and servants stood turned to stone.

"Go out of here!" she commanded from her elevation. "Go out of here, or I leap."

He dismissed the servants by a wave of his hand, himself backing to the door.

Marfa Andreevna maintained her position on the edge of the window-sill, with the window wide open.

"And how long dost intend to stand there?" he asked from the threshold.

"Until that stone there splits with the heat, or as long as it pleases me."

Something prompted Plodomassof to hu-

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mour her. He went out, and she stood there until daybreak.

VII

BY MORNING LADY OF THE MANOR

The late autumn dawn found the village,—or more correctly speaking, the manor house,—in a condition such as had never before been seen in those parts: the house was beleaguered by soldiers.

The reputation acquired by Nikita Plodomassof was such as allowed of no half measures when it came to curbing that debauchée's licence and wresting his prey from him. The governor undertook to pay him a personal visit, and to that end assembled such a retinue as enabled him to count with some certainty on not coming out of that house head foremost.

He had three whole detachments of dragoons. One blockaded the house on the side of the wood, shutting the inmates from all possibility of flight that way. Another took

up its position partly between the house and the village, partly along the river Touritsa, cutting off all hope of reinforcement or defence from that quarter, while the third, having at its head the governor, an officer, the wronged father, and the dragoon who, a few hours before, had witnessed the forced marriage, advanced directly on the robber's lair. But can that house be called a robber's lair, which shows so little daring or defiance? Yes; for that very reason does the name well become the house, that now, before the approach of a force so formidable as not to admit of resistance, not one of the inmates showed the least spark of pluck, not the least sign of an effort being made to bear with dignity the lot of the vanquished.

Quite the contrary! All that turbulent, servile mob had quieted down, cowed and hushed at sight of a force of which they never had had an idea, though their master had, but had long forgotten.

The heads of the inmates of the Plodomas-

sof house,—or such of them as were still in working order,—revolved but one thievish thought: how to save their own skins at the cost of the master's.

Plodomassof called no one to arms or to his defence, for one thing, because he read treason on all the faces which met his eyes. On all? Not so. One there was, on which he saw no ill-will, no treason, and that was the face of his young wife, the unwilling cause of all this disturbance.

Plodomassof's fifteen-year-old consort manifested neither alarm nor tremor, neither agitation nor vengeful joy. She stood on the window-sill conscious of but one feeling: the feeling of boundless love with which she gazed at her father, as he swiftly strode at the head of the detachment. The surrounding crowd of women, trembling as with ague, stretched out timid hands to their young mistress where she stood at her post on the window-sill, and murmured piteously: "Save us! Save us! It was none of our doing."

Plodomassof heard these supplications and himself would fain have prayed to her to defend him, the great wrongdoer, and it somehow seemed to him . . . yes, it almost seemed to him that she might. . . .

VIII

NEW TERRORS

Under the influence of all these troubled and fearful feelings, the Plodomassof women, herded together in their new-made mistress's room, were still more alarmed at a new phenomenon, which robbed them of the last remnant of their wits. They suddenly became aware of the presence in their midst of two unfamiliar figures, never before seen, and come no one knew whence, two wonderful women. How they got there was a riddle to everyone.

And now it flashed through one affrighted brain that these were not women at all, but supernatural beings, avengers and harbingers

of death, issued out of the walls of the doomed house. And, indeed, their looks were strange and alarming. One of them, clad in a plain jerkin, pale as a corpse, had eyes like live coals—a tigress, bereft of her young. The other . . . what a face, and what clothes! The face of an Ethiop, two long teeth glistening in the dark cavern of the half-open mouth; straggling grey hair falling from the head in thick tresses; the dry, dark-coloured breast open from neck to waist; a divided skirt stuck, trouser fashion, into wide, many-coloured gaiters, and, in the hands of each,—a knife!

"Look! Spirits of darkness!"

These words, uttered by a terrified voice in everybody's hearing, acted as an electrical shock; all present, awaiting here the solution of their common fate, seized by superstitious dread, fell heavily to the ground. Horrified, Plodomassof himself turned his face to the wall, covering it with his hands.

Alone, his young wife showed no fear: she

flew into those women's embrace, and, dropping her head on the breast of one of them, burst into uncontrollable tears. Plodomassof timidly raised his eyes and beheld a strange group: the two unknown were enfolding his wife in their arms and backing with her to the door, holding the glistening knives raised above her breast. Inconceivable!

Plodomassof again covered his eyes and did not see how the knives were put away and the three embraced more closely, softly whispering.

There is no need, of course, for the readers to share the terror of the Plodomassof household at the appearance of the mysterious strangers. They will have no difficulty in guessing that the two women who had entered so opportunely and with such striking effect were the young housewife's mother and her Turkish nurse, whom, with their wretched little horses, we saw starting in pursuit of their child. They had arrived with the firm intention of invading her prison by door or

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window, and saving her, by death, from dishonour. Judging from the determined manner in which they proceeded, they could not but have succeeded, since for those who give no thought to their own safety a way to the goal always opens. But it so happened that they encountered no obstacles. They simply took advantage of the general confusion, entered unopposed and, unhindered, made their way through the long suite of empty rooms, and presented themselves, like apparitions, at the very minute when the governor and Baïtsourof opened the undefended front door of the mansion. The new visitors also walked through all the rooms and entered my lady's chamber. The scene which confronted them struck them dumb. The dignitary, prepared for resistance and stubbornness, was nonplussed at the sight of the trembling culprit and of all his henchmen kneeling prostrate on the ground. The offended father was dumbfounded when instead of hearing his daughter's cries and

groans, he beheld her safe, her pretty head reposing on the warm maternal bosom.

But Plodomassof's belated submissiveness could not serve to justify him. There was against him the testimony of the dragoon, who had been a witness to the forcibly performed marriage ceremony, as well as of all the others, who hastened to testify against him, both those whose testimony had weight and value, and those whose word was naught before the law.

"The lot which awaits you is a sad one, and not to be divided," the governor declared to the thoroughly demoralized boyar.

At this moment there was heard in the corridor outside the door the clanking of fetters incautiously dropped by some heedless hand.

Plodomassof covered his face with his hand, and, falling to his knees with a sob, begged for but one boon—the permission to take leave of his wife.

It seemed to him that she, and she alone, would forgive him,—and his instinct did not

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deceive him. He could think of only her name at this dire moment when the clanking of chains behind the door made him beg for the respite of a few last minutes of freedom; the wild soul seized on the sweetly comforting thought that he had a wife, that there existed one pure being in whose name he might sue for more merciful judgment.

"Wife? You have no wife, sir," the governor reproved him. "In your wicked self-conceit you apparently forget that from this lady you may expect, not merciful consideration, but intensest condemnation. This noble damsel will surely join her voice to those which have testified against you, and that will be the last speech you will have with her. I pray you, lady, tell us, have you indeed been married to this gentleman by bodily violence, as all here present have testified?"

"Married to him I have been in truth," she said,—and paused.

The governor begged her to go on

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Marfa Andreevna glanced at the humbled Plodomassof with poignant pity and answered:

"Yes; I was indeed married to him, but no violence was used."

"What! No violence?" exclaimed the astounded governor.

"How is that, my darling daughter? Can it be that all these things happened of thine own will and consent?" cried Baïtsouroff, flinging up his hands.

The surrounding crowd stood dumbfounded at this inconceivable incongruity. The mother alone read the solution of the puzzle in the innermost recesses of her daughter's heart. She pressed her hand and whispered:

"Right so, daughter, right so!"

"Let no one suffer on my account!" spoke the girl in her mother's ear, hiding her sweet young face on her shoulder.

"Tell us, then, lady, how did everything take place in this extraordinary affair? We

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have positive proofs to the contrary. . . . You are still upset. . . . Take courage."

Marfa Andreevna lifted her head from the maternal shoulder and replied:

"Whatever and from whomever you may have heard, concerns me not. With regard to myself, my husband is guiltless, and I have no complaint against him."

The governor's amazement grew to such a pitch that he openly confessed, with a helpless gesture, that the whole thing was beyond his comprehension.

Old lady Baïtsourof intervened to help him out, and, taking a step forward, said: "A maiden's heart is a mystery. Let a maid fall from her bed, and, before she touches the ground she will have thought forty different thinks, and nothing very wonderful in that. So here: maid at sunset, by midnight wedded wife, in the morning housewife, and it becometh not a wife to appear as either plaintiff or witness against her husband. And now," she concluded, taking her daughter

by the hand and gently pushing her forward, "it is a housewife's place to invite her honoured guests to her board and feast them."

Marfa Andreevna addressed the governor, bowing low:

"I pray you, graciously to partake of our bread-and-salt."

Still puzzled, the governor looked at her with bewildered eyes.

"Excellency," the bride's mother again stepped forward, speaking for his hearing alone,—"bells or no bells, wife is wife, inalienably her husband's, once a priest has performed the ceremony. Not by our will, but by hers and God's we now see her here mistress and ruler instead of abducted captive. In our country, menial testimony does not convict, and the wives of our blood do not appear against their husbands. She has settled the matter, and she now waits for your excellency to offer her your arm and escort her to the banquet."

The governor clicked his heels together,

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offered Marfa Andreevna his arm, and conducted her down the stairs to the state apartments.

The room in which all these events took place was gradually being deserted, and at last Plodomassof stood in the middle of it, alone. He dimly felt that the terrible disaster which had threatened him was averted; he realized that all this was the work of his child-wife; but he also felt and realized that, along with the danger, his power had passed from him for ever. The captive had conquered her captor, and he beheld her firm, gracious spirit hovering over all that was his in these vast domains.

He felt that henceforth she would reign supreme, not he, and all the wild turmoil of his wild passions was pacified.

Yes; his power was gone, taken from him. There he stood alone, by all forsaken, forgotten, he heard the guests' voices from the distant state apartments; all these menials, who but now had raised their insolent noses

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at him, now humbly went about their work, vying with each other in servile obedience to the new will, which had so suddenly asserted its supreme authority, and he himself, the great Mogul, sultan and absolute master of all he surveyed, was stripped of all authority, —and was glad! He quietly crossed himself, whispering: "O God, that hast thus ordained all these things, glory to Thee!"

Plodomassof felt as troubled as a bashful child, not knowing how to get away from this spot on which he stood, whither to betake himself, how to show his face in the novel conditions in which he found himself. But the new rulers of his house had watchful eyes, all-seeing.

Old lady Baïtsouroff, after installing the governor and the dragoon in the seats of honour, left them to be entertained by her husband and made her way back to Plodomassof, whose hand she took, saying:

"Well, now, thou cunning thief, dost see what disaster thy stealing has brought down on thy head?"

"Mother-in-law, I thank you more than words can tell," he replied, and fell to his knees at her feet.

"Not for thy sake, however, was all this done, but for our own souls'. We, in our family, are no lovers of squabbles and law-suits, and thou shouldst think it shame in all thy man's bravery, tamely to lie at a woman's feet. . . . Rise, rise!" she went on, more gently. "Stolen wife as she is, we cannot take her back. But bear in mind, that no suitable mate art thou for her, and that an old husband, if ill-tempered to boot, lies heavier than manacles on a young wife's wrist."

"Lady mother, leave off worrying! She shall be mistress absolute over all."

"Yes,—but look to't, son, that thy menials' impudent eyes see not my daughter's tears. And now let us bide in loving harmony together as behooves near relatives, and go down to our guests in due state."

They embraced and kissed, and taking

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his arm, the old lady went down with him to the state drawing-room, where Plodomassof was expected by his young wife and their uninvited guests. Nothing was left to Nikita Yuritch, but to celebrate his wedding in their company, which he did, afterwards dismissing them to their several homes, laden with costly gifts.

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Ignatius Dombrovsky

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Legend of the Saturday Sunbeam

By Ignatius Dombrovsky

(*Translated from the Polish by Mrs. H. A. Loviaguine*)

SURROUNDED by his usual attentive audience, children of his native village, old Maciek Grzenda related as follows:

"Once upon a time, it being a Saturday, awful black clouds covered the whole sky, so that not a single ray of sun was to be seen. People left their houses, came into the street, looked at the sky on all sides, and wondered what would come next. Storm?—but there was no storm; rain?—there was no rain either! But what then?

"Our Lady, carrying the Holy Infant in Her arms, came also out to have a look at the sky.

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No sun, no warmth, not a single bright ray; only heavy, dark clouds overcast the sky all around, and drops of rain seemed to be on the point of falling. Our Lady sighed, almost weeping.

"'Oh, my darling Jesus,' exclaimed she; 'I have to hang your shirts, but how can I do it if it will be raining in a minute? I have washed them so carefully, and now they will not get dry!'

"'Never mind, Mother dear!' replied the Holy Infant; 'I shall do without the shirt, remaining in the old one.'

"'But how can you? It is dirty already,' said Our Lady, 'and tomorrow is Sunday and we must go to church.'

"The Holy Infant grew pensive; He understood that His mother was right.

"' Well, try and hang them up, if it is necessary, there is nothing to be done,' said He.

"Our Lady returned into the house, took the shirts, and, still anxious, began to hang them out in the yard, whilst Her Infant Son sat

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down on a hay-stack, and, whispering a prayer, patiently awaited His Mother's return.

"Our Lady spread on the fence one shirt, then another, and so on, looking anxiously at the sky. The clouds grew thicker and thicker still, hanging over the earth, and the sun seemed never to have shone at all. At last, sighing deeply, she said again to Her Son:

"'Probably all my work will be lost; I see they will not get dry. How shall you, my own poor darling, be without a clean shirt on a Sunday?'

"But the Infant did not reply. Our Lady spread another shirt and became aware that it was very worn out and short. She became still more alarmed and said:

"'Oh, dear me, how shall I afford to sew you new shirts, my darling Jesus! These are quite old, and you have so outgrown them that you will hardly be able to get into them! And I have no linen in the house, no thread of flax in the corn-bin, and not a farthing of money! Oh, poor, poor me!'

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"Infant Jesus still sat on the hay-stack, and remaining silent, played with some stalks.

"Our Lady stood on the threshold and only shook Her head out of grief and sadness. It was evident that in a minute it would rain and the shirts would get wet; and should it even not rain—they would still remain wet, as there was no sun and consequently no warmth.

"Our Lady stood and moaned. Finally she approached Her Infant Son and said:

"'Suppose, my darling, you ask your Father to give us a milk-pot full of sun? It is neither day nor night, darkness alone, and not a drop of warmth!'

"The Infant grew pensive. He saw that His beloved Mother was right. He fell on His knees on the hay-stack, crossed His tiny hands for prayer, and said:

"'Almighty Father, let, I beg you, if only one single ray of sun fall on the earth and comfort my beloved Mother who is very much afflicted. And permit also, My dearest Father, that my shirts become large and

almost as new, because there is no linen in our house and no money at all.'

"Scarcely had Infant Jesus pronounced these words when the clouds seemed to be as if cut through by somebody's hatchet, and it became so bright as though on the sun itself. Our Lady marvelled and full of joy ran to the fence to look at the shirts, because they were the chief reason of her grief. To Her utmost joy She saw that they were quickly getting dry, exhaling steam; and, oh, wonder, they became longer and longer!

"Almost weeping from joy Our Lady quickly took the shirts off the fence that they might not fall and get dirty, whereas Infant Jesus, seeing what a joy He had caused to His Mother, smiled and said further:

"'In order that people be always somewhat comforted and cheered up, allow, My kind Father, the sun to shine every Saturday if even a bit only and to clear up any obscurity.'

"Since then, every Saturday, whatever it be,

and as cloudy as it would be, one single ray, even if only one, must fall on the earth. If not all people see the same, it is due to the fact that this sunbeam is a marvellous one, and therefore it can be seen only by good, pious religious people, whereas those who are wicked and sinful do not see it, because their sins, like shadows, walk before them and stand in their light."

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Th. M. Dostoyefsky

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The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree

By Th. M. Dostoyefsky

I AM a novelist, and I believe I have invented a story. Why do I say "I believe," when I know for certain that I did invent it? But somehow I cannot rid myself of the idea that this really happened somewhere, and, of all days, on a Christmas eve, in a big, big city, on a terribly cold day. Methinks I can see the boy, a very small boy, some six years old, or even less. This boy awoke one morning in a cold and humid basement. He had on some kind of a light, loose coat, and shivered. His breath came out of his mouth as white steam, and he, sitting on the corner of a wooden chest, found amusement in letting out this steam and watching it disperse. But he was very hungry. Several times, from earliest

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morning, he had gone up to the bunk, on which, lying on a mat not much thicker than a pancake, with some kind of a bundle in place of a pillow, reposed his sick mother. How did she get here? Probably came with her boy from some provincial town and had fallen suddenly ill. The landlady, who let "corners" to lodgers, had been taken to the police station two days before; the lodgers had dispersed, and the only one left had been lying dead drunk for the last twenty-four hours, in anticipation of the holiday. In another corner, moaning with rheumatism, lay an old woman of eighty, who at some time had been a children's nurse, and now was dying, solitary and forlorn, groaning and grumbling at the boy, so that he became afraid of going near her corner. He had found water to drink somewhere in the hall, but not a crust could he hunt up anywhere, and he tried for about the tenth time to rouse his mother. He began at last to feel queer in the dark; the evening had set in long ago, but no one got a

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light. He felt his mother's face, and wondered why she did not move at all and was as cold as the wall. But then it was very cold there, he thought, stood awhile, forgetting to take his hand from the dead woman's shoulder, then breathed on his small fingers to warm them, and, following a sudden impulse, fumbled on the bunk for his shabby cap, and softly groped his way out into the street. He would have gone sooner, but was scared of the big dog upstairs, which had been howling all day outside a neighbour's door. Now the dog was gone, and he found himself in the street.

My, what a city! Never had he seen anything like it. There, where he had come from, the nights were pitch dark: just one lamp for a whole street. The small, low, wooden houses had shutters; the streets were deserted the moment twilight set in. Not a soul; people shut themselves up in the houses, and only bands of dogs—hundreds, thousands of them—howled and barked all night long. But he had been warm there and had had

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enough to eat, while there . . . Lord! if only he *could* get something to eat! And what noise and thunder! What dazzling light! What crowds of people! . . . horses, carriages. . . . And the cold, the cold! Frozen steam rises in clouds from the hard-driven horses, out of their hot-breathing mouths and nostrils; through the soft snow is heard the clanking of their shoes against the pavement, and there is such a pushing, pressing. . . . And, oh, Lord! he does so much want to eat, just a little something! . . . And his tiny fingers all at once begin to hurt him so. A police officer passed him, and turned away, so as not to have to notice the boy.

And now—another street. Such a wide one! Here they will surely trample him down! How all these people run, and drive, and shout! And the light—so much light! And, oh! what is this? A window. Such a big glass! And behind the glass—a room. And in the room—a tree, so tall,—right up to the ceiling. It is a Christmas tree, and on it

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such a lot of little flames, of gilt paper and apples, and all around it are little dolls, little horses; and all about the room children—such clean, dressed-up children,—running, jumping, laughing, and eating and drinking things. Now one little girl is starting to dance with a little boy,—such a pretty little girl! And there goes music, you can hear it through the glass. And as the little boy in the street looks on, he too laughs; yet the toes on his feet are also beginning to ache, and as to his fingers, they are quite red; he cannot bend them, and it hurts to move them. Suddenly he remembered that they all hurt so, and he began to cry, and ran farther on. But there again is a glass window, and behind it a room, and in the room are trees; but there are tables, and on the tables, cakes,—all sorts of them—red, yellow, with almonds; and four richly dressed ladies sit there and give the cakes away to all comers; and every minute or so the door opens and people go in and come out. The little boy stole up to that door, opened it

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quickly and went in. Oh dear, how they shouted and waved their hands at him! One of the ladies hastily went up to him, slipped a copper coin into his hand, and herself opened the door for him. How frightened he was! And he dropped the coin, which rolled, jingling, down the steps: he could not bend his stiff, red fingers so as to hold it. He ran as fast as he could run, with no idea of where he was running to. He felt like crying, but he was too frightened, and could only run, and, as he ran, he breathed on his hands to warm them. He felt so strange, so alone and forlorn. Suddenly . . . oh Lord, what is this now? An admiring crowd stands before a window, on which, behind the glass, are three dolls, dressed up in red and green gowns, looking just as if they were alive! An old man sits there too, playing on something which looks like a very large fiddle, and two more stand by his side and play on small fiddles; they look at each other and nod their heads in time and their lips move; they are speaking

but one cannot hear them, because of the glass between. The boy thought at first they really were alive, and when he was quite sure they were dolls, he laughed aloud. He never had seen such dolls and never imagined there could be such! He wanted to cry, yet had to laugh, —the dolls were so very, very funny! At this moment he felt that someone took hold of him from behind: a wicked, big boy who stood next to him struck him heavily on the head with his fist, snatched away his cap and kicked him from below. The little fellow rolled over on the ground; people shouted and scolded; numb with fright, he somehow picked himself up and ran, ran madly on, till, half unconsciously, he skipped into a gateway and found himself in a big yard, where he cowered down behind a stack of wood; he felt safe there, it was dark, and "they" would not find him.

He sat still and made himself quite small, but could not get his breath with fright. Suddenly,—so suddenly! he felt quite com-

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fortable; hands and feet ceased to hurt, and he felt as warm as if he were sitting by the stove. He straightened with a start; why, he had all but fallen asleep! How nice it would be to go to sleep here. "I will rest here awhile, and go again to look at the dolls," thought the boy, and smiled to himself, adding: "Just like they are alive." Then it seemed to him that his mother was singing for him as she used to. "Mother, I am sleeping; it is so nice to sleep here!"

"Come to me; come to my Christmas tree, boy!" a gentle voice whispered quite near.

He thought at first it was his mother; but it was not. Who is it then that calls him? He cannot see; but someone is bending over him; an arm enfolds him in the dark. He puts out his hand . . . and lo! what brightness! what a flood of light! . . . And oh! what a tree! But no, it is not a tree; he has never seen such trees . . . *Where* is he, anyhow? Light and radiance everywhere, and so many, many little dolls all around him . . . But no! they are not dolls; these are all little

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boys and little girls, so pretty and bright, some dancing, some flying, and they all press and crowd around him and kiss him, and, as he gazes, his mother is there to, and looks at him, laughing happily.

"Mamma, Mamma! Oh, how nice it is here!" he exclaims, and again kisses the children all round, and wants to tell them quickly all about the dolls behind the glass; but asks them instead: "Who are you, little boys? Who are you, little girls?" And laughs, and loves them all.

"This is Christ's Christmas tree," they answer him. "On this day Christ always has a tree for such little children as have no tree of their own down there . . ."

And he learned that these boys and girls were all children like himself, but some had frozen to death in the baskets in which they had been exposed on backstairs, at the doors of government officials; others had perished in wretched hovels, whither they had been sent from the Foundlings' Hospital; others again

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had died of starvation at their mothers' dried-up breasts, or had been suffocated in the foul air of third-class railroad cars. And now, here they all were angels, Christ's guests, and He Himself was in their midst, stretching out His hands to them, blessing them and their poor, sinful mothers. And these children's mothers also stand there, a little apart, weeping; each one knows her own little boy or little girl; and the children fly up to them, and kiss them, and wipe their tears with their tiny hands, and beg them not to weep, for they, the children, are so happy here. . . .

And down below, on that Christmas morning, there was found in a yard the body of a small boy who had run in from the street, hidden behind a stack of wood, and there frozen to death. His mother too was found. She had died before him; they had met in God's heaven. . . .

What in the world made me invent such a story, and tell it, too, in this sober diary of

mine, which should treat only of real things and current events? . . . But then, you see, I cannot get rid of the idea that all this may have really happened,—I mean what took place in the basement and behind the firewood. As to Christ's Christmas tree and what went on there, I can't tell you for sure whether or not it may have really happened. But I am a novelist, and it is a novelist's business to invent.

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L. N. Tolstoi

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Three Deaths

By Count L. N. Tolstoi

I

IT was autumn. Two travelling carriages were rolling along the highway at a rapid trot. In the leading carriage two women were seated. One—the mistress—was pale and emaciated. The other—the maid—was stout, and her cheeks glowed rosy. Her short, dry hair escaped, from the faded bonnet, and she brushed it aside impatiently with a coarse red hand encased in an old glove, out at the fingers' ends. Her full bosom, across which a warm shawl was pinned, breathed health, her quick black eyes now looked out of the window at the fields as they ran past, now turned to the mistress, or restlessly investigated the corners of the carriage. Be-

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fore her nose dangled the lady's bonnet, hanging from the net overhead, while on her lap reposed a puppy. Her knees were raised high, because of her feet resting on sundry boxes and caskets, which encumbered the bottom of the carriage and upon which they scarce audibly drummed, to the sounds of the slightly jolting springs and the rattling windows.

With hands folded in her lap and eyes closed, the mistress feebly swayed and slipped on the pillows piled behind her back and slightly frowned, shaken by an ugly inner cough. She wore a white nightcap and a blue kerchief tied round her pale, delicate neck. From under the cap showed the straight parting of her hair, which was smoothed to perfect flatness with pomatum, and there was something dry and dead about the whiteness of the skin in that wide parting. The wilted skin of the face loosely indicated its once firm, beautiful and refined contours and took on a flush on the cheeks and cheek-

bones. The lips were dry and restless, the sparse eyelashes did not curl, and the loose woollen travelling gown hung in straight folds on the flattened bosom. Notwithstanding that the eyes were closed, the face expressed weariness, fretfulness, and habitual suffering.

The footman dozed, leaning back in his comfortable seat on the box, next to the *yamstchik* (post-boy, driver) who kept briskly shouting at the sweating team of good-sized horses, from time to time looking back where the other *yamstchik* drove the open carriage following behind, also shouting at his team. The broad parallel wheel tracks advanced rapidly and evenly along the chalky mud of the road. The sky was gray and bleak; a cold mist descended on the fields and highway. The inside of the carriage felt stuffy and smelt of cologne and dust. The sick woman threw back her head and slowly opened her eyes,—big eyes, brilliant and of a beautiful dark colour. "Again!" she said,

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nervously pushing away with her thin but shapely hand a corner of the maid's coat, which just touched her foot, and her lips curved morbidly. The maid gathered the garment about her with both hands, rose a little on her strong feet, and sat down farther to one side, a vivid flush spreading over her fresh young face. The sick woman's beautiful dark eyes followed her every movement. She tried to lift herself by bracing her hands on the seat, but her strength failed her. Her lips curved and her whole face was distorted by an expression of impotent, resentful irony:

"You might at least help me some. . . . Oh, well, never mind! I can manage; only don't pile on me your old satchels, please! . . . Better don't try, since you are so awkward!"

The lady closed her eyes once more, but suddenly raised her eyelids and glanced at the maid, who was looking at her and biting her red, lower lip. A heavy sigh escaped the

sick breast, but was cut short by a fit of coughing. She turned away, frowned and pressed both her hands to her breast. When the cough had subsided, she again closed her eyes and sat motionless as before. Both carriages were entering a village. The maid freed a fat hand from under her shawl and crossed herself.

"What is it?" asked the mistress.

"The station, madam."

"What are you crossing yourself for, I ask?"

"A church, madam."

The lady turned her face to the window and slowly crossed herself, looking with her big, wide-open eyes at the large village church, which the carriage was just rounding.

Both carriages drew up together before the station. From the open carriage alighted the sick woman's husband and the doctor, and approached the other carriage.

"How do you feel?" inquired the doctor taking her pulse.

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"Well, dear," chimed in the husband, in French, "don't you feel tired? Should you not like to get out for a while?"

The maid gathered the various small bundles and squeezed herself into a corner, so as not to be in the way.

"I'm the same, thank you," answered the sick woman. "No, I shall not get out."

The husband remained standing awhile, then walked away and entered the station. The maid sprang agilely out of the carriage and tiptoed her way across the muddy space to the gate, through which she passed.

"That I am wretched is no reason for you to miss your luncheon," the lady said to the doctor, who was still standing by the window of the carriage.

"No one really minds about me," she muttered as soon as he walked away, slowly at first, then at a brisk trot, and ran up the steps.

"They are all right, so what do they care? Oh, my God!"

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"Well, Edward Ivanovitch," said the husband, joining the doctor and rubbing his hands with a cheerful smile,—"I have ordered my man to bring in the hamper—how do you feel about that?"

"A good idea," approved the doctor.

"And how is she?" inquired the husband with a sigh, lowering his voice and lifting his eyebrows.

"I told you she could scarcely get as far as Moscow, let alone Italy. In this weather, too."

"I know, but what can I do? Oh, my God!" and he covered his face with his hands. "Bring it here," he ordered the man who came in with the hamper.

"You should have stayed," replied the doctor with a shrug.

"But what could I have done, tell me that!" retorted the husband. "I tried everything to detain her, talked of money, of the children, whom we have to leave, and of my business; she won't listen to anything. She makes plans for her life abroad, as though

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she were well. And to tell her of her condition were to kill her."

"She is killed already; it is necessary you should know that. No one can live without lungs, and lungs, once gone, don't grow anew. It is sad, very; but what would you? Our business, yours and mine, consists in making her end as easy as possible. Spiritual ministration is what she needs now."

"Oh my God, only think of me having to speak to her of her will! No! I will not. Let things go as they will. You know how kind-hearted she is." . . .

"Try, anyhow, to persuade her to stay," said the doctor significantly, shaking his head,—"or you may have worse trouble, travelling."

"Aksiùsha!—say, Aksiùsha!" here broke in a shrill treble, as the station-master's daughter, throwing a shawl over her head, stepped out, stamping her feet on the muddy back porch;—"come along; let's have a look at the lady from the Shirkin estate; it is said she is

consumptive and they are taking her abroad. I never yet saw what consumptives are like."

Aksiùsha rushed out to join her chum, and both, holding hands, ran out of the gate. There they fell into a walk, and, passing the carriage, looked in at the open window. The sick woman turned her head towards them, but noticing their curiosity, frowned and turned away.

"Mercy!" exclaimed the station-master's daughter, quickly turning away too. "Such a beauty as she was, and look at her now! Frightful! You saw, Aksiùsha, didn't you?"

"Yes. Just skin and bones," commented the girl. "Let's pass her once more; we'll make believe we are going to the well. Look: she turns away her face; but I have seen it. How pitiful, Masha!"

"Just look at the mud!" remarked Masha, and both ran back through the gate.

"I suppose I do look a fright," thought the sick woman. "Oh! only to get to Italy quick, quick! There I shall soon recover."

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"Well, dear, and how do you feel?" spoke the husband, still chewing on his last morsel as he approached the carriage.

"Always that same question," she thought; "and eating the while!"

"I'm all right," she breathed through her teeth.

"Do you know, dear, I'm afraid travelling in such weather will make you worse; the doctor says so too. Shall we not turn back?"

She kept angrily silent.

"The weather will improve," he went on; "the roads may settle, and you will feel better. Then we could go all together."

"Excuse me, had I not listened to you this long while, I should now be in Berlin, and in good health."

"What could I do, my angel? It was impossible; you know all about it. And now, if you only would wait a month you would get so much stronger; I should wind up my business, and we could take the children."

"The children are well, and I am not."

"But do realize, dear, that, should you grow worse while travelling . . . At home you would, at all events, be more comfortable."

"Home! what's the good of home? . . . To die there?" she retorted irritably. But the word "to die" visibly cowed her; she threw her husband a questioning, beseeching look. He cast down his eyes and was silent. Her lips suddenly curved and quivered, like a child's, and tears ran down her cheeks. Her husband pressed his handkerchief to his face and walked away without a word.

"No, I will go on," she declared, raising her eyes to heaven. She folded her hands and went on, muttering incoherently, while her tears flowed faster: "My God, what have I done to deserve this?"

She prayed long and fervently, but her breast felt sore and oppressed; the sky, the fields, the road,—all were bleak and grey; the same uniform mist, neither denser nor thinner, hung over the mud of the road, over

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the roofs, over the carriage and over the sheepskins of the men who were greasing the wheels and harnessing the horses, at the same time exchanging remarks in vigorous, cheery voices.

II

The horses stood harnessed, but the *yamstchik* still lingered. He entered the *izbà* (log-house), occupied by him and his comrades. It was hot, close, dark; there was a mixed smell, of freshly baked bread, cabbage, and sheepskin, together with heavy living-room effluvia. Several men stood and sat around; a woman was fussing about the oven, cooking, while on top of the oven, bedded on sheepskins, lay a sick man.

"Uncle Fiòdor! say, Uncle Fiòdor!" (Theodor) spoke a young fellow all dressed for the road, in his sheepskin coat, a short whip stuck in his belt, addressing the sick man after he had crossed himself, facing the ikons, as he came into the room.

"What do you want of him?" intervened one of the *yamstchiks;* "can't you see they're waiting for you out there in the carriage?"

"I want to beg his boots of him, mine are all trodden down," replied the lad, tossing his hair off his forehead and fingering the leather driving-mittens at his belt. "Is he asleep? Say, Uncle Fiòdor," reiterated he, going up to the oven.

"What is it?" asked a feeble voice, and a sunken red-haired face bent down from the top of the oven. A broad, emaciated, bloodless, and hairy hand pulled the coat serving as a blanket higher up the bony shoulder covered with a red shirt: "Give me a drink of water, brother . . . What did you want?"

The lad brought him the wooden scoop full of water.

"Well, you see, Fiòdor," he said, awkwardly shifting his feet, "I guess you shan't be needing your new boots now; so won't you let me have them? I don't hardly expect you will be walking again."

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The sick man, lifting his weary head, applied his lips to the dripping scoop, and drank feebly and greedily, wetting his sparse hanging mustache in the darkly glistening water. His tangled beard was untidy, his dull, sunken eyes were raised with difficulty to the lad's face. Having drunk his fill, he tried to lift a hand to dry his lips, but could not; so he rubbed them against the sleeve of the coat. Silently and breathing hard through his nose, he gathered all his strength and looked straight in the lad's eyes.

"Maybe you have already promised them to someone?" said the latter. "Never mind. It is wet and muddy, and I have to travel; so I thought to myself 'I'll ask Fiòdor for them. I guess he won't need them.' Or, maybe, you do need them? Then say so."

Something began to rumble and bubble in the sick man's chest; sitting up, he bent double and choked in his throat with a hollow, dry cough.

"Need them, forsooth!" unexpectedly,

crossly broke in the woman, in the hearing of the entire roomful. "For the last two months he never set a foot on the floor. Only to listen to that heart-rending cough of his goes right through my insides. What need has he of boots? He isn't going to be buried in his new boots. And it's about time he were anyhow, the Lord forgive me! There now: just hearken to that. He should be taken to the other *izbà*, or somewhere. He takes up a whole corner here, and there you are. No room to turn round in. Yet I'm expected to keep the place tidy."

"Hello, Seriòga, come out and take your seat on the box; the gentry are waiting," the station elder's voice shouted from outside the door.

The lad was about to go without longer waiting for an answer, but the sick man, in the midst of his paroxysm, signified by blinking his eyes that he wished to speak.

"You can have them," he said when the cough had subsided, after a moment's rest.

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"Only put up a stone for me when I am gone, do you hear?" he added in a feeble croak.

"Thank you, uncle. I'll take 'em. And you shall have your stone, never fear."

"Here, boys, you heard him," the sick man managed to bring out, and again bent over, choking.

"We heard, make your mind easy," said one of the men. "Now go, Seriòga. See the elder coming again on the run."

Seriòga promptly pulled off his disproportionately large boots, burst open at the toes, and flung them under the bench. Uncle Fiòdor's new boots proved a perfect fit, and he walked out of the room and to the carriage, admiring them.

"Fine boots. Great. Let me grease them for you," said the man who had been greasing the wheels and still held the box of axle-grease, while the lad, having clambered to his seat, was gathering the reins. "Did you get them as a free gift?"

"Envious, eh?" teased Seriòga, rising on his

seat and wrapping the skirt of his long, ample driver's coat round his legs. "Let go! Hey, you darlings," he shouted at the horses, flourishing his short whip; and both carriages, with their passengers and luggage, rapidly rolling away along the drenched and miry road, vanished in the grey autumnal mist.

The sick man in the stuffy *izbà*, having succeeded in partly overcoming the suffocating cough, by a supreme effort turned over on his other side and lay still.

All day long, until evening, men kept coming in and going out, talked, dined, but there was never a sound from him. Just before night the woman climbed up to him and reaching across his legs, took down a sheepskin coat.

"Do not be cross with me, Nastassia," he said with an effort; "it won't be long now before I vacate your corner."

"That's all right . . . I don't mind; don't you worry," muttered the woman. "What

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is it that hurts you so, Uncle Fiòdor? Tell me."

"My whole insides is sore, just perishing. God knows what ails it."

"Guess your throat hurts too when you cough like that,—don't it now?"

"I'm sore all over. Death is coming for me, that's what it is . . . O-o-o-h!" he groaned.

"Let me cover your feet better,—so," and Nastassia, as she got down, pulled the coat over him more closely. It was dark in the room but for the pale glow of a rushlight. Nastassia and some ten *yamstchiks*, loudly snoring, slept anywhere, on the floor and on benches. The sick man alone feebly groaned, coughed and tossed in his corner.

Towards morning even that ceased, and he lay absolutely still.

"A curious dream I had," spoke Nastassia, stretching and yawning in the pale morning gloaming. "I thought I saw Fiòdor get down from his bed on the oven and go out to

chop wood. 'Let me help you, Nastia,' says he; and I reply: 'Don't you bother, that's no work for you.' But he takes up the axe and begins to chop,—so fast, so fast, the chips flying every way. 'Why,' I say: 'I thought you were sick.' 'No,' says he, 'I am well,' and with that swings his axe so I get scared, and scream and wake up . . . What if he be dead? . . . Uncle Fiòdor. Say, Uncle!"

There was no answer.

"Why, what if he should be indeed? Better have a look," said one of the men, who had but just awakened.

The emaciated hand, covered with reddish hair, hung down, cold and bloodless.

"Must go and tell the station-master. It does look as if he was dead," spoke the man.

Fiòdor had no relatives; his home was far away. On the morrow they buried him in the new churchyard behind the grove, and Nastassia was telling everybody of her dream and how she had been the first to discover that Uncle Fiòdor was dead.

III

Spring had come. The streets glistened wet, and between small frozen dung heaps little rivulets hurried and purled; bright colours flashed everywhere in the briskly-moving crowds; loud, cheery talk was in the air. In the front yards the buds were swelling on the trees, and their boughs gently swayed in the cool breeze. Everywhere there was running and dripping of translucent waters. Sparrows chirped unmelodiously and fluttered on their little wings. On the sunny side of streets, on fences, roofs, and trees, all was motion and brightness. There was joy and young life in the sky, on earth, and in the hearts of men.

On one of the principal streets, in front of a large, aristocratic-looking mansion, fresh straw was spread; within the house we find the same woman, now dying, whom we saw hastening to get abroad.

Before the closed door of her room stood

her husband and an elderly woman. On the sofa sat a priest, with eyes cast down, holding in his hands something carefully wrapped in a stole. In a corner, in a deep armchair, half reclined an old lady, the dying woman's mother, weeping bitterly. Beside her stood a maid, holding a clean pocket-handkerchief in readiness until it should be required; another was rubbing the old lady's temples with some lotion, and blowing on the crown of her head, under her cap.

"God bless you, my dear friend," the husband was saying to the elderly woman who stood with him before the door;—"she reposes such confidence in you,—you know so well how to talk to her; do persuade her; go to her now, do!"

He was about to open the door for her, but the cousin detained him, mopped her eyes several times with her handkerchief, and said, tossing her head:

"There; I believe it won't be so apparent now that I have been crying."

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Then she opened the door and entered the room.

The husband was greatly agitated and seemed quite unmanned. At one moment he seemed about to approach the old lady, but, before he had quite reached her, he retraced his steps, took a few turns in the room, and approached the priest instead. The latter looked at him, lifted his brows heavenward, and sighed. His short, but full beard, slightly sprinkled with silver, also was raised somewhat and lowered again.

"My God, my God!" uttered the husband.

"We can do nothing," sighed the priest, and again his brows and beard were lifted and lowered.

"And mother here!" almost despairingly exclaimed the husband. "She never will outlive this. To love as she loves her . . . I can't imagine . . . I wish, Father, you would comfort her and persuade her to leave here. . . ."

The priest went up to the old lady.

"Verily," he began, "a mother's heart is not to be appraised. Yet God is merciful."

The old lady's face began to twitch and she was seized with hysterical hiccough.

"God is merciful," went on the priest, when she had quieted down somewhat. "Let me tell you: in my parish there was a man much sicker than your daughter, and what do you think? A plain man of the people cured him in a short time by the use of some simple herbs. And this very man is in Moscow now. I spoke of him to Vassili Dmìtrevitch: it might be worth trying. It would, at least, be a comfort to the patient. To God all things are possible."

"No; she is not to live," spoke the old lady; "God will take her, although of the two, I should rather be the one to go."

Here the hysterical hiccough again overcame her, to the loss of consciousness.

The husband covered his face with his hands and fairly ran from the room.

In the passage he came upon his six-year-

old boy, racing at top speed a little girl younger than himself.

"Would you not order the children taken in to see mamma?" suggested the nurse.

"No; she does not wish to see them. It would upset her." The boy stopped for a second, fixedly looking in his father's face, then suddenly kicked out with one foot and was off again with a whoop.

"We make believe she is the black mare, Papa," he shouted, pointing to his sister.

In the adjoining room, meanwhile, the cousin sat by the sick bed and, by skilfully conducted talk, strove to direct the patient's mind towards thoughts of her approaching end. At the window stood the doctor, mixing a draught.

The patient, in her white bed-gown, sat up, propped by many pillows, and silently gazed at her cousin.

"Oh, my dear," she unexpectedly interrupted the speaker, "do not try to prepare me. Do not take me for a child. I am a

Christian. I know all. I know I have not long to live. I know that, had my husband listened to me sooner, I should now be in Italy and possibly, even surely, restored to health. Everybody told him so. But it is all no use. Such apparently is the will of God. We are all laden with many sins, I know that. But I rest my hope on God's mercy. It is my hope that we shall all be forgiven,—all. I try to understand myself. On me too are many sins, my friend. But then, how much have I not suffered! I have striven to bear my sufferings with patience."

"Shall I then call in the father, dear? You will then feel still more relieved," suggested the cousin.

The patient inclined her head in token of consent.

"Lord forgive me, a sinner!" she murmured.

The cousin stepped out and beckoned to the priest.

"She is an angel," she said to the husband, with tears in her eyes. He, too, wept. The

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priest passed through the door, but the old lady had not recovered consciousness, and the stillness in this first room was absolute. Some five minutes later the priest returned from the sick-room, slipped off his stole, and set his hair in order.

"Thank God, she is calmer now," he said; "she wishes to see you."

The husband and the cousin went in to her. She was weeping quietly, gazing at an ikon.

"I congratulate you, my darling," he said.

"Thanks How wonderfully well I feel now. What inconceivable sweetness is this that I experience." As she spoke, a gentle smile played around her thin lips. "How merciful is God,—is He not? Gracious He is and all-powerful!"

And she again, with fervid piety, turned her tearful gaze on the ikon. Then she suddenly seemed to remember something and called her husband to her.

"You never will do anything I ask," she said in weak and querulous tones.

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Her husband, stretching his neck to hear, listened submissively.

"What is it, dear?"

"How many times did I not say that these doctors know nothing. There are common, ignorant women who can cure. Also men. The father spoke of one. . . Send for him. . . ."

"Send for whom, dear?"

"My God, he *will* not understand! . . ."

She frowned and closed her eyes.

The doctor, coming up, took her pulse. The beats were growing noticeably feebler. He signed to the husband with his eyes. She noticed the movement and looked around in affright. The cousin turned away weeping.

"Don't cry; don't torture yourself and me," said the dying woman; "it takes from me my last shred of calmness."

"You are an angel!" her cousin exclaimed, kissing her hand.

"No; kiss *me*, not my hand: it is only the

dead whose hand is kissed . . . Oh, my God! . . ."

That same evening she was "a body," lying in a coffin which stood on a table in the largest room of the big house. All the doors were closed, and there was no one in the room, save an old cleric who read the Psalms in a measured, nasal voice. The vivid light shed by the wax tapers in their tall silver candlesticks fell on the pale brow of the departed, on her lifeless, waxlike hands and the stiff folds of the pall, with the ghastly elevations caused by the knees and toes. The cleric read in an even, low, monotonous, sing-song, irrespective of the meaning of the words, which sounded strangely and died away in the stillness. From a distant room sometimes came the sound of children's voices and the tapping of little feet.

"Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled," rang the words of the Psalmist; "Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they

are created and Thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the Lord shall endure forever."

The dead face was severe and majestic. Nothing stirred either in the cold, pure brow or in the firmly folded hands. She seemed all attention; yet, did she even now realize the greatness of these words? . . .

IV

A month later a stone chapel rose over the noble lady's grave. But no "stone" as yet marked that of the *yamstchik;* only light green grass was sprouting on the hillock, which was the only reminder of a human being's whilom existence.

"You will be committing a sin, Seriòga," once admonished the cook Nastassia, "if you don't buy Fiòdor a 'stone.' You blamed it on the winter. Winter, indeed! Why don't you keep your word, now it's spring? I was present, mind you. He came to you once

already and begged; if you still don't buy that stone, he will come again, and then he will choke you."

"Why, I'm not backing out of my promise. I will buy the stone; I'll buy one for a rouble and a half. I have not forgotten. But it has to be hauled down here. The first time I have an errand in town, I shall buy it."

"You might at least set up a cross so long," put in one of the older men; "it's really not decent as it is. You are wearing his boots, aren't you?"

"And where am I to get a cross? I can't hew one out of a log, can I?"

"What are you talking about? If a log won't do, take your axe; go out into the grove some morning bright and early, and cut down an ash or something, and there you are. For why, where's the use of wasting good vodka on the ranger for every trifle? A while ago I broke my splinter bar, so I cut myself a new one,—a beauty,—and nobody said a word to me."

Early next morning, soon after daybreak, Seriòga took his axe and went out into the grove. Over all things still lay the dull grey of an abundant dew, unillumined by the sun. The east was imperceptibly brightening, casting a pale reflection on the veil of thin, vaporous clouds mantling the vault of heaven. Not a blade of grass stirred below, not a leaf on the topmost boughs of trees. Only an occasional soft whirr of wings in the dense foliage, or a light rustle on the ground broke the stillness of the wood. Of a sudden, a strange sound, foreign to nature, burst on the silent air and died away at the outskirts of the wood. Again it came and was repeated at regular intervals down by the trunk of one of the motionless trees. Then one of the crowns quivered in a peculiar way; the leaves, swelling with sap, trembled and whispered, and a hedge-sparrow sitting on one of the branches, twice fluttered back and forward whistling, then, wagging its small tail, flew over to another tree.

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The axe down below, meanwhile, sounded more and more dully; sappy chips flew and fell on the dewy grass, and after each stroke was heard a slight cracking. The tree shivered from top to root, bent and quickly straightened again, swaying as with sudden fear. For an instant all was still; then the tree bent again, there was a loud crash inside its trunk, and, with breaking limbs and drooping branches, it fell heavily to one side, striking the humid earth with its crown. No longer were heard the strokes of the axe or the steps of the man. The hedge-sparrow whistled and fluttered higher up. The branch which its wings caught swayed awhile and remained motionless as the others, with all its leaves. The trees seemed still handsomer and glad of the room newly cleared for them.

The first rays of the sun, having pierced a semi-transparent cloud, lit up the heavens and swiftly raced over earth and sky. The mist rolled in waves in the hollows; the dew sparkled on leaves and grass; transparent

cloudlets, now paled to a pure whiteness, hurriedly dispersed over the more and more intensely blue vault. Birds fussed in the thickets, chirping happily; the sappy leaves quietly and gaily whispered to one another in the tree-tops, and the boughs of the live trees waved slow and stately, above their dead companion.

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Ragozin, Zinaida Alekseevna
Little Russian master-
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